

Original Paper

Strategies for Developing Pre-Employment Adaptability from a High-Quality Employment Perspective: An Analysis of College Students' Job Preparation Behaviors

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Abstract

This study surveyed the job preparation behaviors of 210 college students and proposed strategies for job preparation behaviors that college students need to adapt to before entering the workplace. The results indicate that the overall level of students' job preparation behaviors is moderately average ($M=3.07$). Among the sub-factors of goal achievement behaviors, tool preparation behaviors, and information gathering behaviors, goal achievement behaviors scored the highest ($M=3.14$). Male students had higher scores in information gathering and tool preparation behaviors than female students; senior students outperformed junior students in information gathering; and students in science and engineering majors scored higher in information gathering and tool preparation behaviors than those in humanities and social sciences. The findings of this study have practical significance for optimizing and improving employment planning education in higher education and provide a foundational reference for research in high-quality employment, employment equality, and industry-education integration.

Keywords

High-quality employment, adaptability development, college students' employment, job preparation behaviors

1. Introduction

As the economic structure continuously adjusts and the labor market becomes increasingly competitive, high-quality employment has become a core issue in discussions of China's economic and educational policies (Chang, 2022). For college students, developing market-demanded adaptability skills before graduation is crucial not only for their personal career development but also directly impacts the economic vitality and innovation capability of society (Xing, 2023). However, the employment issue for college graduates remains a longstanding and complex challenge. Since the class of 2018, the turnover rate within six months has consistently been around 42%, with dissatisfaction with salary and benefits maintaining a long-term rate of 43%, dissatisfaction with personal development opportunities at 31%, and those who find job demands high and stressful at 25%. Those who are not accustomed to management systems and culture account for 19% (MyCOS, 2023). Moreover, the increasing demands and conditions that enterprises require from graduates, along with heightened work arrangements and performance evaluations, further prove that the threshold for job market entry is high, challenging the feasibility of employment planning education. Therefore, to enhance the effectiveness of employment education, more detailed and practical employment planning strategies are necessary.

During high school, most students are focused on university admission, leading a passive and dependent life under the guidance of parents or schools. Upon entering university, deciding on their future becomes challenging. Liu, Lin, and Wu (2023) conducted surveys and interviews with students at 16 Chinese universities, finding variations in self-positioning and cognition among college students, with 12.5% of students feeling that they cannot accurately assess themselves, and 2.23% completely unable to do so; 58.48% of the respondents had never made a career plan. Peng and Yu (2023) found that 87.87% of students exhibited "lying flat" behavior, with 3.12% choosing to lie flat directly, and 33.61% attributing their inaction to mismatched external pressures and personal capabilities. Based on these findings, some researchers believe that a lack of understanding about themselves and the professional world, as well as unclear job prospects, leads to negative employment attitudes among college students, such as anxiety, stress, burnout, procrastination, and avoidance of job-seeking decisions, which significantly affect their job preparation during university (Lee, 2019). Thus, it is crucial for college students to implement a series of employment-related efforts to prepare for social integration (Jung, 2018).

Job preparation is a specific, substantive behavioral readiness (Jeon, 2023). Sung (2020) argues that achieving employment goals is difficult with just a mature employment consciousness or attitude, as it only offers a cognitive advantage, but successful employment also requires concrete actions. Yun (2020) believes that through active job preparation during college, students can develop the ability to proactively handle temporary difficulties, thereby making reasonable employment decisions with confidence and maintaining a sense of responsibility for their choices after entering society. Conversely, a lack of job preparation during college can indicate unclear career planning and goals or a tendency to take any available job before choosing an ideal one (Sharmila, Yuji, & Ramayah, 2018). Hoff, Van,

Napolitano, Hanna, and Rounds (2022) suggest that job preparation is strongly associated with personal future development; students who are insufficiently prepared tend to feel lost in the job market and have difficulty capturing employment opportunities.

Additionally, job preparation behaviors vary in effectiveness based on personal characteristics. Lee (2019)'s study surveyed 440 college students and found that their level of job preparation was generally low, especially in practical efforts. In information gathering behaviors, females scored higher than males, while males scored higher in purchasing tools and practical efforts. In terms of majors, humanities and social sciences scored highest in information gathering, while engineering scored lowest. In purchasing tools, natural sciences majors scored higher than humanities and social sciences. In practical efforts, natural sciences majors also scored higher than humanities and social sciences (Jung, 2018). Thomas, Muriel, and Hessel (2014) suggest that female college students might face more challenges and opportunities in job preparation, possibly related to their career experiences in science, engineering, and mathematics fields.

Therefore, prior research has revealed that the main issue with the employment quality faced by college students is the lack of attention to their job preparation behaviors during their university years, leading to unclear career planning at this stage. Job preparation involves multiple factors that affect students' future development and can indicate an individual's pre-professional readiness during their university years. This study analyzes the situation of job preparation behaviors and proposes strategies for college students to adapt to workplace demands before entering the job market, aiming to facilitate their smooth employment and achieve high-quality career development. Accordingly, this study raises the following two research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the comprehensive and differential situation of college students' job preparation behaviors?

Research Question 2: How can college students effectively prepare for employment from a high-quality employment perspective before adapting to their professional work?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Definition of Job Preparation Behaviors

Job preparation behavior is a process of job exploration, information gathering, and developing the necessary job competencies (Hwang, 2015). Arnett (2000) considers job preparation behavior as effectively collecting information about oneself and the desired occupational world to obtain the necessary materials, methods, tools, or pathways to achieve one's career goals, investing time and energy in utilizing the acquired tools and resources. Soelberg (1969) divides individual job behaviors into four stages: constructing career ideals, formulating job search plans, finding a job and making a choice, and finally accepting a job offer. Blau (1992) defines job preparation behavior as the process in which job seekers collect information, identify, and define their job-seeking objectives during the job-seeking plan phase. For college students, job preparation behavior involves gathering and utilizing

necessary information to address the immediate goal of employment, preparing the required strength in the professional world (Lee, 2004). McKeown (2011) views college students' job preparation behavior as the preliminary preparations made for future job-seeking, where the persistence shown during this process is the best indicator of their ultimate success, while job quality is a key factor in their continued job-seeking efforts. Savickas (2013) emphasized the positive role of meaning construction in individual career lives, where individuals manage various challenges and transitions related to their career by imposing personal meanings on their occupational behaviors, with most college students hoping to be well-prepared for their careers before graduation. Therefore, the preparation in consulting, evaluation, and information gathering before job-seeking is a model for addressing problems and challenges during employment or career periods and is a primary source of employment success.

2.2 Constituent Factors of Job Preparation Behaviors

Different researchers have varying interpretations of the factors that make up job preparation behaviors. Lim and Yoon (2005) define job preparation behavior as encompassing cognitive, defining, and action levels of readiness, proposing specific preparatory behaviors at the action level, professional and occupational knowledge at the cognitive level, and occupational certainty and decision-making efficacy at the perceptual level. Yoon and Seong (2012) view the factors of job preparation behaviors as self-understanding behaviors, employment capability enhancement behaviors, and occupational world exploration behaviors. Here, self-understanding behaviors are based on an individual's understanding of psychological and environmental characteristics; the process of efforts made to enhance professional capabilities are considered employment capability enhancement behaviors; and behaviors involved in collecting and exploring occupational information are categorized as job exploration behaviors. Park (2018) interprets job preparation behavior as the individual effort made to find information about various aspects of oneself and equip the necessary vocational tools to achieve employment goals. Accordingly, the factors include information gathering behavior, tool preparation behavior, and goal achievement behavior. Information gathering behavior refers to the act of collecting specific and rational information about oneself and the occupational world, including personal traits, adaptability, interests, abilities, and information about professions, prospects, current status, environments, including methods of entry. Tool preparation behavior involves acquiring the textbooks, equipment, or materials necessary to enter the target company, including obtaining unique qualifications or licenses required for each position. Goal achievement behavior refers to the actual effort spent in time and energy to reach set goals.

This study will discuss the concept of preparation behavior as proposed by Park (2018) as the constituent factors, meaning that job preparation behaviors are practical actions taken to prevent potential negative consequences on one's path to achieving personal goals.

2.3 Impact of Job Preparation Behaviors

Job preparation behavior is a proactive attitude that helps college students integrate into society and realize their self-worth, laying a solid foundation for their future development (Yannan, Jacquelynne, 2020). Alex, Gursimran, and Dean (2014) believe that positive job preparation behaviors help college students understand employment market demands and trends, such as through internships, practical training, club activities, and volunteer services, allowing students to contact different industries, companies, and positions, clarify career directions, and avoid blindly choosing professions. Banach, Foden, and Vernon (2019) argue that job preparation behaviors also play a positive role in enhancing students' comprehensive qualities and abilities; they need to continuously learn, practice, and reflect to improve their professional knowledge, skill levels, and team collaboration abilities, making them more competent in future work and supporting their career development. Dieu (2020) indicates that students with good job preparation behaviors are likely to have strong competitiveness and confidence in employment, better understand market demands, and can exhibit a positive and upward attitude toward life, willing to continuously grow in learning and practice.

Conversely, a lack of job preparation may lead college students to lack clear planning and goals for their future careers, blindly follow trends, or choose unsuitable career directions, wasting time and energy during their university years and ultimately failing to achieve their career ideals and values (Jacobus, 2020). Sharmila, Yuji, and Ramayah (2018) state that in a competitive job market, students with rich practical experience and excellent comprehensive qualities are more likely to stand out. However, college students lacking job preparation miss out on opportunities due to a lack of relevant experience and skills, making it difficult to obtain ideal job positions. Hoff, Van, Napolitano, Hanna, and Rounds (2022) believe that insufficient job preparation behaviors indicate a high level of confusion and helplessness among students facing employment, lacking problem-solving abilities, thereby disrupting their future career development and life trajectory.

Thus, job preparation behaviors are related to future career development and also serve as a verification indicator of personal effort. Good job preparation is crucial for college students' career success, while a lack of effort in job preparation not only indicates confusion in goals and directions during the school stage but also represents poor adaptability in future careers, impacting their future development.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Component		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	70	33.3%
	Female	140	66.7%
Grade	1	24	11.4%
	2	50	23.8%
	3	84	40.0%
	4	52	24.8%
Academic	Humanities and Social Sciences	130	61.9%
Directions	Science and Engineering	80	38.1%
Total		210	100%

The demographic details of the participants are shown in Table 1. There were 70 males (33.3%) and 140 females (66.7%). By year, there were 24 first-year students (11.4%), 50 second-year students (23.8%), 84 third-year students (40.0%), and 52 fourth-year students (24.8%). Regarding majors, there were 130 students (61.9%) from Humanities and Social Sciences and 80 students (38.1%) from Science and Engineering.

3.2 Instruments

The tool used in this study for job preparation behavior is the scale from Park (2018), measured using a Likert 5-point scale, consisting of 18 items as shown in Table 2. It includes three factors: information gathering behavior, tool preparation behavior, and goal achievement behavior. Information gathering behavior includes six items such as "Recently, I have discussed my personality and future employment with friends," "I have browsed online for information related to the professions I am interested in," and "I have specifically learned about the qualification requirements for the career fields I am interested in." Tool preparation behavior includes five items such as "Recently, I have bought or read guides or training courses related to the professions I am interested in," "I have bought or read books or manuals related to the professions I am interested in," and "I have purchased textbooks, reference books, or other necessary equipment as advanced preparation for entering the career fields I am interested in." Goal achievement behavior includes seven items such as "Recently, I have personally visited companies or institutions related to the professions I am interested in and have made similar visit plans," "I have watched TV programs related to the professions I am interested in, or attended exhibitions, briefings, etc.," and "I have had conversations with people who work in the career fields I am interested in." According to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson (2009), a Cronbach's α above 0.7

indicates good reliability of the scale. In this study, the overall Cronbach's α for job preparation behavior is 0.832, with 0.885 for information gathering behavior, 0.944 for tool preparation behavior, and 0.901 for goal achievement behavior.

Table 2. Composition and Reliability of the Research Instruments

Factor	Number of Items	Factor Cronbach's α	Overall Cronbach's α
Job Preparation Behavior	Information Gathering Behavior	6	0.885
	Tool Preparation Behavior	5	0.944
	Goal Achievement Behavior	7	0.901
		18	0.832

3.3 Procedure

Given that online surveys are a cost-effective method and not geographically restrictive (Tan & Teo, 2000), this study collected data through the Questionnaire Star APP, which provided an explanation of the study's purpose and participant details before participants completed the survey. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS 25.0 software. First, a comprehensive statistical analysis was conducted to examine the overall level of job preparation behavior and its sub-factors: information gathering behavior, tool preparation behavior, and goal achievement behavior, including tests for normal distribution through kurtosis and skewness analysis. Subsequently, t-tests and ANOVAs were employed to analyze differences in demographic factors across the sub-factors of job preparation behavior.

4. Research Results

4.1 Basic Situation of Participants in Job Preparation Behaviors

To understand whether the job preparation behaviors, along with the sub-factors of information gathering, tool preparation, and goal achievement behaviors, meet the conditions for a normal distribution, descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, kurtosis, and skewness were utilized. The mean (M) for job preparation behavior is 3.07, information gathering behavior is 2.97, tool preparation behavior is 3.09, and goal achievement behavior is 3.14. The values for skewness and kurtosis are between -2 and 2. According to Nadarajah (2011), distributions are considered normal if kurtosis and skewness values are between -2 and 2, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Sample on Various Variables

Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewne ss
Job Preparation Behavior	3.07	0.39	-.059	-.158
Information Gathering Behavior	2.97	0.58	-.485	-.408
Tool Preparation Behavior	3.09	0.80	.526	-.446
Goal Achievement Behavior	3.14	0.54	.012	-.076
N=210				

4.2 Analysis of Differences in Job Preparation Behaviors

An analysis of variance was conducted to examine the differences in job preparation behaviors among college students based on demographic characteristics. Differences in gender and major were analyzed using the t-test, while differences in year levels were analyzed using ANOVA, as shown in Table 4.

Regarding gender, information gathering behavior ($t=2.199$) and tool preparation behavior ($t=5.872$) showed statistically significant differences. Goal achievement behavior did not show statistical significance. Males exhibited higher levels of information gathering ($M=3.09$) and tool preparation behaviors ($M=3.51$) compared to females, who scored ($M=2.90$) in information gathering and ($M=2.88$) in tool preparation.

Among year levels, information gathering behavior ($F=4.031$) was statistically significant. Tool preparation and goal achievement behaviors did not show statistical significance. Third-year students scored the highest in information gathering behavior ($M=3.13$), followed by fourth-year students ($M=2.90$), with first ($M=2.84$) and second-year students ($M=2.82$) trailing.

In terms of major, differences in information gathering behavior ($t=2.984$) and tool preparation behavior ($t=8.120$) were statistically significant, whereas goal achievement behavior was not. Students in science and engineering majors scored higher in information gathering ($M=3.12$) and tool preparation ($M=3.59$) compared to students in humanities and social sciences ($M=2.87$ for information gathering and $M=2.78$ for tool preparation).

Table 4. Differences in Job Preparation Behaviors

Component	Category	Employment readiness behavior		
		Information collection behavior	Tool preparation behavior	Goal achievement behavior
Gender	Male ($M\pm SD$)	3.09 \pm 0.63	3.51 \pm 0.64	3.06 \pm 0.45
	Female ($M\pm SD$)	2.90 \pm 0.55	2.88 \pm 0.78	3.19 \pm 0.58

	t	2.199*	5.872***	-1.739
Grade	1 (M±SD)	2.84±0.51	2.74±0.80	3.06±0.55
	2 (M±SD)	2.82±0.55	3.02±0.81	3.12±0.58
	3 (M±SD)	3.13±0.56	3.21±0.63	3.18±0.46
	4 (M±SD)	2.90±0.62	3.13±0.98	3.15±0.62
	F	4.031**	2.330	0.343
Academic Directions	humanities & social sciences (M±SD)	2.87±0.54	2.78±0.73	3.12±0.55
	Science and engineering (M±SD)	3.12±0.61	3.59±0.64	3.18±0.53
	t	2.984**	8.120***	0.699

*p≤.05 · **p≤.01 · ***p≤.001 · N=210

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the job preparation behaviors of college students, thereby proposing strategies for students to focus on before entering the workplace. This involved formulating two research questions and conducting comprehensive statistical and differential analysis on 210 college students. Initially, the descriptive statistical analysis revealed that the overall level of job preparation behavior among the students is moderately average. Among the sub-factors, goal achievement behavior scored the highest, followed by tool preparation and information gathering behaviors. This suggests that there is room for improvement in students' job preparation efforts. College students tend to enhance their job readiness through practical operations and personal experiences. The relatively low scores in information gathering behavior indicate that this crucial component of job preparation also needs attention, with students needing to enhance their skills in utilizing resources to improve information filtering, analysis, and usage. The secondary status of tool preparation behavior suggests a possible deficiency in specific tools and materials necessary for job readiness.

The differential analysis showed that males scored higher than females in information gathering and tool preparation behaviors, consistent with some findings of Thomas, Muriel, Hessel (2014), and Lee

(2019). This could be related to gender differences in career interests and behaviors, with males possibly more inclined towards technical and engineering fields that often require more extensive tool preparation and technical information gathering. Conversely, females may engage more in the humanities and social sciences, which may focus more on theoretical learning and conceptual understanding. This also may reflect societal gender roles, where men are expected to be more active in technical and practical tasks.

Senior students exhibited better information gathering behaviors than juniors, likely because they are closer to graduation and thus place greater emphasis on gathering career-relevant information, such as industry conditions, job requirements, and future career advancement opportunities. The differences in goal achievement and tool preparation behaviors across different years were relatively even, showing an increasing trend with advancing academic level, possibly reflecting uniformity in the provision of career guidance and practical opportunities by educational institutions.

Students in science and engineering majors scored higher in information gathering and tool preparation behaviors than those in humanities and social sciences, consistent with some of Lee (2019)'s findings. Science and engineering fields often require specific skills and the use of tools like software and laboratory equipment, likely leading these students to emphasize mastering tools and acquiring information in their job preparation efforts. Humanities and social sciences may focus more on theoretical knowledge and analytical skills, with less demand for specific tools. Additionally, students in technical majors may have more opportunities for internships, workshops, and laboratory activities, all of which indirectly influence their career preparation behaviors.

These findings confirm the first research question, "What is the overall and differential situation of college students' job preparation behaviors?" They also address the second research question, "How can college students effectively engage in job preparation behaviors from a high-quality employment perspective before adapting to their professional roles?" Based on the study's results, universities should enhance career-related courses and lectures, such as market analysis and industry trend forecasting, to help students develop a keen sense of career information and analytical skills. Courses could also incorporate more content on using career planning tools, preparing students with the tools and materials needed for the workplace. Considering the trend that students excel in goal achievement, universities should strengthen collaboration models involving industry and academia and offer more internships and practical training opportunities, ensuring students can engage with real work environments during their studies and better adapt to future careers.

For female students, who scored lower in information gathering and tool preparation behaviors, educational institutions should offer more activities promoting equal employment and raise awareness of the importance of fair employment during career planning educational events. This includes focusing on the employment status and conditions for female students and providing internship opportunities early to help them gain professional experience.

Regarding the differences between grades, it's important to emphasize the significance of early career

exploration and planning for lower-year students. Schools could design courses for lower-year students that broadly introduce career-related information, allowing students to set goals for careers they are interested in and then engage more smoothly in precise goal-directed efforts in their senior years. Encouraging upper-year students to share their experiences in career planning and preparation with lower-year students could help younger students understand the professional paths and initial career planning.

In terms of academic disciplines, universities could offer more interdisciplinary practical opportunities for students in humanities and social sciences, allowing them to engage in cooperative learning and communication across disciplines. This could enhance their interdisciplinary thinking and help students understand the professions and work environments that suit them from different perspectives. It could also break down students' limited understanding of their majors, increasing their likelihood of mastering skills beyond their field of study. Notably, female lower-year students in humanities and social sciences might need particular attention as they represent a group with lower characteristic features in various factors. Universities should provide more robust support for these students, such as one-on-one career counseling, career planning seminars, and interdisciplinary study group training, enabling them to effectively engage with university employment services and understand how their interests match different career demands, thereby fostering their job preparation awareness early on.

Lastly, the conclusions of this study can enhance the target effectiveness and practicality of career planning education by studying the performance of different student groups in job preparation behaviors. Universities can adjust career-related courses and activities to ensure these measures meet the actual needs of students, particularly improving their information gathering and tool preparation capabilities, which are crucial for their future career success. The findings regarding the specific needs of female and humanities and social sciences students can help educational institutions and schools implement more targeted measures, ensuring that these student groups receive high-quality career education and job preparation support. The study also suggests that schools and educators need to help students establish career goals and development paths from the beginning of their studies and provide humanities and social sciences students with interdisciplinary practice opportunities. Through industry-education integration models, more opportunities for real work environments can be provided, helping students better understand industry demands and reduce the career adaptation period after graduation, thereby achieving high-quality employment.

5.2 Limitations and Future Prospects

This study's sample size is relatively small, which may not represent the actual situation of all college students, and the authenticity of the survey responses could not be verified, which might affect the analysis results. Additionally, the data collection was primarily through questionnaires, and descriptive statistics and variance analysis methods were used for discussion, but some detailed and deeper factors might not have been fully explored, including the lack of investigation into potential relationships between variables. Future research could consider surveys of students from different regions and types

of universities to enhance the representativeness and universality of the results. Alternatively, in-depth interviews or case studies could be conducted to gain deeper insights into college students' job preparation behaviors. Detailed discussions on the potential factors influenced by personal and environmental constraints could provide more references for the practical application of university employment guidance education.

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