

## Original Paper

# Equal Employment and the Promotion of College Students' Job Preparation Behavior: The Impact of Social Support and Goal Orientation

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### Abstract

*In the rapidly changing and highly competitive job market, equal employment has become an important indicator of social progress and economic justice. This study aims to explore the impact mechanisms of social support, goal orientation, and career decision-making self-efficacy on college students' job preparation behavior from the perspective of equal employment. Path analysis was conducted on survey data from 350 college students, and the results showed that both social support and goal orientation positively influence career decision-making self-efficacy and job preparation behavior. Career decision-making self-efficacy fully mediates the relationship between social support and job preparation behavior, as well as between goal orientation and job preparation behavior. The study finds that effective strategies to enhance college students' job preparation behavior include strengthening career decision-making self-efficacy, setting specific career goals, and providing ample social support. Through joint efforts by universities and students, multiple layers of protection in the employment environment can be achieved, ultimately leading to high-quality employment.*

### Keywords

*Equal employment, Social support, Goal orientation, Career decision-making self-efficacy, Job preparation behavior*

## 1. Introduction

In the context of a rapidly changing and highly competitive job market, equal employment has become an important indicator of social progress and economic justice. In recent years, many graduates have

perceived discrimination in employment based on factors such as education level, gender, household registration, and experience, which impacts their job preparation behavior and poses potential risks to individual and socio-economic development. Equal employment refers to providing equal opportunities to job seekers and employees in all aspects of employment, including recruitment, promotion, and treatment, without subjective discrimination based on objective factors or other non-job-related factors (Na & Chang, 2019). With increasing investment in talent development, the number of graduates and the demand for jobs continue to rise. However, issues of employment discrimination after graduation are also frequent. For example, a survey by Tang and Wang (2022) on 500 graduates from private colleges showed that nearly 400 respondents experienced various types and degrees of discrimination during the recruitment process, with only 102 reporting no discrimination, 120 experiencing discrimination twice, and 108 three times or more. Zhou's (2019) survey of students from nine universities revealed that after experiencing employment discrimination, 67% of college students did not take any legal action to protect their rights, mostly expressing dissatisfaction but ultimately accepting the situation. In such cases, perceived employment discrimination may gradually affect students' career choices, learning motivation, and social cognition, directly leading them to abandon job preparation due to perceived employment inequality (Zhu, 2014).

Job preparation behavior refers to the relevant actions college students take in transitioning from school to work, considering their abilities and addressing current employment issues on a more practical level. This includes gathering information about themselves and their target careers, preparing the necessary conditions for their target careers, and making practical efforts to achieve their goals (Baiyan, Xiaoqing, Qun, & Yuege, 2024). Yu and Kim (2022) pointed out that one of the reasons students feel inequality in employment is the lack of planning for the future during their academic careers or a mismatch between their ideal jobs and actual ability levels, leading to feelings of unequal treatment even if they successfully secure a job after graduation. Zhu's (2014) study suggests that schools and relevant regulatory bodies need to strengthen their support for equal employment for college students. Students also need to proactively understand the dynamics and requirements of their target careers and job markets, assess their employability based on the information they gather, and make accumulative achievements in their intended companies in advance. Therefore, good job preparation can help college students avoid situations of employment inequality.

Promoting college students' job preparation behavior requires the combined effects of social support, goal orientation, and career decision-making self-efficacy. Social support is a comprehensive term for the help and resources individuals obtain through social relationships, including emotional attention, effective support, and environment-related information. College students are in a transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood, and their understanding of social support is crucial for their future planning, job preparation, and adaptation to the environment (Chope, 2001). Baiyan, Xiaoqing, Qun, and Yuege (2024) argue that college students with social support are more active in their job-related efforts due to the assistance of multiple resources. Do's (2019) study showed a positive correlation

between social support and job preparation behavior. Won (2015) noted that the job-seeking process often involves uncertainty, and students who perceive parental support can better cope with these negative conditions, maintain a positive job-seeking mindset, and thus engage in job preparation more effectively.

Clear goal orientation is also a pathway to promoting job preparation behavior. Although setting career goals may not immediately lead to achieving employment goals, the clarity of goal orientation and the tendency of willpower drive individuals' intrinsic motivation to gradually execute plans and move closer to their final goals (Kim, 2015). Individuals with clear goal orientation usually set specific career goals, which provide clear direction for their job preparation behavior. Clear career goals help job seekers focus on specific career fields, avoiding getting lost in the employment process, thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness of job preparation (Won, 2015). Additionally, the impact of goal orientation on job preparation can be explained by the fact that individuals with higher intrinsic motivation actively seek various resources and opportunities to achieve their set career goals. This intrinsic motivation drives them to continuously improve their skills and knowledge, actively participate in vocational training and internships, and make thorough preparations for employment (Yun, 2017).

Furthermore, college students' decision-making confidence can enable them to make reasonable job preparations in response to threats on their career paths (Lee, 2017). Social support and goal orientation represent positive external and internal resources. Relying on social support and goal orientation, individuals are better equipped to develop feasible plans and strategies for career exploration, analyze specific action steps based on their strengths and weaknesses, and actively evaluate their progress at each stage (Byunghwa, 2020; Baiyan, Yuege, Yuzhe, & Jun, 2024; Yun, 2017). Meanwhile, career decision-making self-efficacy often acts as a mediator in the career process, helping individuals cope with the negative consequences of setbacks and failures. It enhances the motivation to persist in behavior, allowing individuals to adjust their methods and continue striving toward their goals even after failure, viewing setbacks as opportunities for growth and learning (Tingyue, Yaoyao, Juan, Hualing, & Cheng, 2024; Xiaoe & Wei, 2023; Kim, 2019). However, it is evident that insufficient job preparation behavior may indicate a lack of positive external support and a clear understanding and planning of career-related information, leading to an inability to make practical and effective career decisions and, subsequently, encountering issues of equal employment during the job search or work process.

Therefore, to promote college students' job preparation behavior and achieve equal employment, social support, goal orientation, and career decision-making self-efficacy can be seen as important factors that positively contribute to students' employment. These factors not only support each other theoretically but also influence each other, collectively shaping the job preparation process of college students. It is necessary to discuss the mechanisms that promote college students' job preparation behavior based on an equal employment perspective, analyzing the impact of social support, goal orientation, and career

decision-making self-efficacy on job preparation behavior. By combining these with the perspective of equal employment, effective strategies to promote college students' job preparation behavior can be proposed. This study proposes four research questions based on the aforementioned theories:

1. What are the current levels of social support, goal orientation, career decision-making self-efficacy, and job preparation behavior among college students?
2. How do social support, goal orientation, and career decision-making self-efficacy influence job preparation behavior?
3. Do social support and goal orientation indirectly influence job preparation behavior through career decision-making self-efficacy?
4. Based on the research analysis, how can college students' job preparation behavior be effectively promoted from an equal employment perspective?

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### *2.1. Social Support*

Social support, originally a concept in the field of psychological and behavioral sciences, refers to the various positive resources provided by individuals in one's social circle, which can reduce the psychological and physical harm caused by negative stimuli (Yeom, 2017). As the concept gained widespread application, different researchers began to define social support in varying ways. Cohen and Hoberman (1983) defined social support as a resource that can be obtained from relationships with others. Leavy (1983) described social support as the help an individual receives in social relationships. Schwarzer, Knoll, and Rieckmann (2004) defined social support as providing emotional stability and problem-solving advice. These varying definitions of social support highlight the emphasis on an individual's objective social network, suggesting that social support is a cognitive evaluation concept of trust in relationships with others.

Given the differences in how social support is conceptualized, its constituent factors also vary significantly. For example, Cobb (1976) divided social support into sub-factors such as emotional support, esteem support, and relational support. Cohen and Hoberman (1983) categorized social support into informational support, material support, emotional support, and self-esteem. In recent years, many studies have begun to consider material support, emotional support, informational support, and evaluative support as sub-factors of social support (Baiyan, Yuege, Yuzhe, & Jun, 2024; Yeom, 2017; Oh, 2020; Ahn, 2018). Emotional support refers to the sense of respect, value, and care an individual feels while establishing close relationships with social members; it is a form of psychological stability provided by others and serves as a foundation for social relationships (Yeom, 2017). Informational support is the knowledge or information an individual obtains through interactions with others to help them solve problems independently or accept and change information. For instance, providing new job information or explaining how to solve problems in the event of employment issues (Ahn, 2018). Material support involves tangible resources offered to an individual

to help mediate behaviors in an objective environment, such as providing money or goods. Evaluative support involves the feedback, confirmation, and social comparison provided by others, which helps individuals clarify and assess their self-concept, acting as a form of support that conveys information related to self-evaluation. It allows individuals to recognize their value through the evaluations provided by others (Oh, 2020).

Although the effectiveness of social support may vary depending on the closeness of social relationships (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981; Voydanoff, 1990), as a factor that helps individuals cope with environmental changes and development, it can directly influence an individual's adaptation to the environment, making it a meaningful variable for predicting behavioral issues (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Kracke, 1997). First, positive social support can help enhance career preparation behavior, assisting individuals in overcoming setbacks, improving psychological adjustment, and ultimately achieving career goals (Byunghwa, 2020; Baiyan, Yuege, Yuzhe, & Jun, 2024). Do's (2019) research confirmed the influence of social support on employment preparation behavior. Kim and Yoon (2019) found that social support significantly supports students' employment preparation behavior and recommended that universities make substantial efforts to provide students with practical employment information, actively offer internships and field practice opportunities, strengthen industry-academia collaboration, and work towards building a system that closely integrates employment education and recruitment. Myunghee, Seonghye, Dohee, and DaHyeon (2016) analyzed data from 152 science students and found a significant relationship between social support and employment preparation behavior, with strong career motivation mediating the relationship between social support and career preparation behavior. Furthermore, social support can also enhance career decision-making self-efficacy. Zhou, Liu, Xu, and Jobe (2024) stated that social support can mitigate the impact of career decision-making difficulties through career decision-making self-efficacy. Wang and Jiao's (2022) analysis of 557 Chinese college students revealed that social support is a key factor influencing career decision-making self-efficacy, confirming that support from people around the individual can help alleviate negative states during the career decision-making process and boost self-confidence.

## *2.2. Goal Orientation*

The concept of goal orientation was introduced by several scholars, including Ames (1984), Dweck (1986), and Nicholls (1989), in the 1970s. The significance of goal orientation lies in providing individuals with criteria for judging success and failure in achievement situations, thereby making behavior predictable (Kyllo & Landers, 1995). Ames (1992) defined achievement goal orientation as the desire or tendency to develop one's abilities in specific achievement situations, thereby demonstrating one's abilities and gaining recognition. Elliot (1999) argued that through achievement goal orientation, learners can determine the purpose of learning to achieve specific goals and what they ultimately aim to accomplish. Subsequently, goal orientation has been considered a factor in predicting student achievement outcomes (Hulleman, Schrager, Bodmann, & Harackiewicz, 2010). Even today, goal orientation is highly regarded in the career field because individuals with high goal orientation

tend to exhibit positive emotions such as hope and expectation, which make them believe their goals are achievable, thus demonstrating an approach-oriented attitude toward their goals. Conversely, individuals with low goal orientation may experience anxiety or fear of failure, leading them to subjectively assess their goals as unattainable, thereby showing a tendency to avoid goals (Elliot, 1999).

In the classification of goal orientation, existing research divides goal theory into mastery goals and performance goals (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984). The difference lies in the purpose of achieving the goal: the primary purpose of mastery goals is to develop one's abilities, while the main purpose of performance goals is to demonstrate one's abilities to others and gain recognition (Kim, 2020). Some studies have proposed multiple classifications of goal orientation. For example, Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) proposed a three-structure goal model, including mastery goals, performance-approach goals, and performance-avoidance goals. Elliot and McGregor (2001) further divided goal orientation into four factors: performance-avoidance, mastery-avoidance, mastery-approach, and performance-approach goals (Pintrich, 2000a). As the education field has developed, goal orientation has been the subject of various related studies. Although different studies have demonstrated different roles for the factors within goal orientation, based on standard goal theory, regardless of performance, mastery, approach, or avoidance, goal orientation is divided into positive and negative aspects (Dweck, 1986). However, performance and approach goal orientation do not always lead to negative outcomes, and having multiple goal orientations is more beneficial than having just one (Kim, 2020; Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001). This study chooses to focus on mastery goals and performance goals, treating goal orientation as a whole as a positive concept for analysis.

Each individual constructs the purpose, attitude, motivation, reason, and methods of life differently through the potential they realize in their career (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004). These varying motivational orientations impact career paths. Therefore, a career can be viewed as an object oriented toward employment goals. Looking at the research results on goal orientation and career-related variables, they are related to career decision-making self-efficacy and job preparation behavior, as college students are about to enter the workforce and need to explore and set goals based on their self-concept, making decisions to transition into society. In this process, they cannot avoid implementing actual career-related behaviors. Kim's (2019) study found that college students' career decision-making self-efficacy is significantly influenced by their level of achievement goal orientation, with higher goal orientation correlating with higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy. Yun (2017) found a positive correlation between college students' goal orientation and job preparation behavior. Based on these studies, it can be predicted that there is a significant relationship between college students' achievement goal orientation, career decision-making self-efficacy, and job preparation behavior.

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

Career decision-making self-efficacy refers to the cognitive processes involving beliefs and abilities related to the likelihood of successfully completing career tasks. It was first developed when Hackett and Betz (1981) applied Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy to the career domain. Self-efficacy is often seen as a mediating variable in individuals' sustained execution of specific behaviors or tasks, and career decision-making self-efficacy inherits this role as a mediator influencing career-related decisive behaviors. Early research on career decision-making self-efficacy was used to explain individuals' career development processes (Bandura, 1977). Hackett and Betz (1981) found that career self-efficacy plays a more critical role in influencing women's career decisions, meaning that women's perceived career self-efficacy expands their range of career choices and career outcomes. Taylor and Betz (1983) defined career decision-making self-efficacy as the confidence in successfully completing tasks related to career decision-making and found that college students with low career decision-making self-efficacy were more likely to lack career decisions and confidence in their tasks and actions. Later, career decision-making self-efficacy gained more attention and was widely applied to the college student population. Jiang, Fan, Zhang, and Li's (2022) research found that college students' career decisions are made through compromise and decision-making processes, specifically setting their career goals and preparing detailed future plans to achieve those goals. However, due to rapid economic development and a shortage of job opportunities, employment difficulties have become the primary obstacle after graduation, so career decision-making self-efficacy must be emphasized. Chunna, Yuzhen, and Zhijun (2019) argued that career decisions are tasks related to self-identity, psychological independence, and economic independence for pre-employment college students. Therefore, strong self-efficacy is an evaluative and driving factor for pre-career behavior.

Taylor and Betz (1983) developed the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale, consisting of five domains: goal selection, future planning, problem-solving, and self-assessment. These self-efficacy beliefs are directly related to general career decision-making tasks and behaviors, assessing the overall career rather than just performance in a specific domain. Subsequent research improved this model, breaking it into four factors: goal selection, career information, problem-solving, and future planning, and confirmed the contribution of career decision-making self-efficacy in the career domain (Kim, 2012; Oh, 2020). Students with higher career decision-making self-efficacy were also more likely to exhibit positive job preparation behaviors (Yeom, 2017). Sanghee, Jaeun, Sungeun, and Songyi (2022) also suggested that students with a certain level of career decision-making self-efficacy would gain confidence in their career paths, enabling them to plan their actions and maintain an optimistic attitude toward challenges. Baiyan, Xiaojing, Qun, and Yuege's (2024) study also showed that career decision-making self-efficacy positively impacts job preparation behavior. Additionally, many studies suggest that career decision-making self-efficacy often acts as a crucial mediating factor in career paths. Tingyue, Yaoyao, Juan, Hualing, and Cheng (2024) found that family support, peer support, and teacher support can directly or indirectly influence career adaptability through career decision-making

self-efficacy, with teacher support having the most significant impact, followed by family support and peer support. Xiaoe and Wei (2023) used structural equation modeling to verify that college students' career decision-making self-efficacy mediates the relationship between career identity and career choice behavior.

#### *2.4. Career Preparation Behavior*

Career preparation behavior refers to the efforts individuals must make to make reasonable and correct career decisions (Jung, 2014). Generally, when individuals strive to successfully obtain or qualify for a position, they engage in a series of preparation activities. These activities aim to enhance personal qualities, improve competitiveness, and enable individuals to quickly adapt to the work environment during the job-seeking process, ultimately achieving the shared development of the individual and the organization (Baiyan, Xu, Siyu, & Yuege, 2024). For college students, career preparation behavior involves preliminary efforts to prepare for future employment, with sustained efforts in this process being the ultimate indicator of success in achieving ideal career outcomes and job quality. Moreover, the significance of career preparation can be built upon personal positivity within a career, meaning that by attributing meaning to career behavior, individuals actively manage and address various challenges. Therefore, the simulation of coping with problems and challenges during career preparation is also a source of employment preparation behavior (McKeown, 2011; Savickas, 2013).

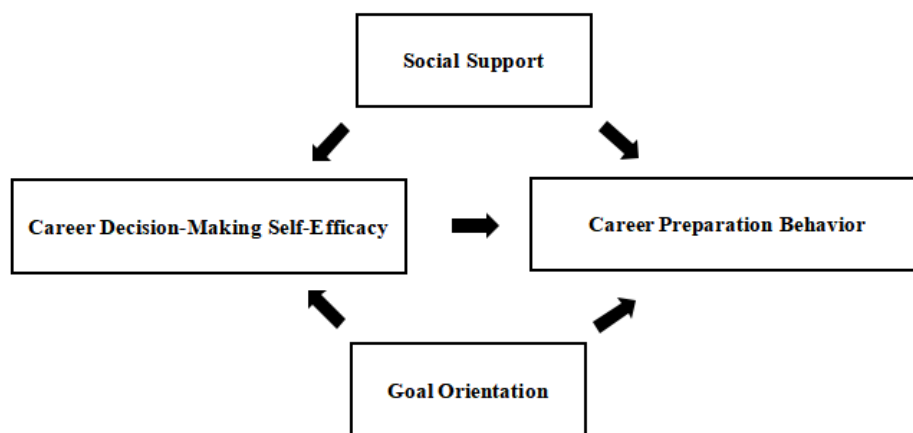
Career preparation behavior involves three aspects: information gathering, tool preparation, and goal attainment. Specifically, information gathering refers to the rational and specific collection of information about oneself and the world of work (Baiyan, Xu, Siyu, & Yuege, 2024). Tool preparation behavior involves preparing the necessary materials, equipment, or licenses to enter the target company (Park, 2018). Goal attainment behavior involves the actual time and effort invested to achieve the set goals (Baiyan, Xiaojing, Qun, & Yuege, 2024). Different researchers have classified the factors constituting career preparation behavior differently. For example, Yoon and Seong (2012) reclassified the factors of career preparation behavior into self-understanding, career enhancement, and career exploration. Lim and Yoon (2005) believed that the factors of career preparation behavior should cover specific preparation, cognitive levels of professional and vocational knowledge, and the certainty and efficacy of career decisions. Jung (2014) categorized career preparation behavior into information gathering activities, career experience activities, career exploration activities, and career preparation activities.

Employment has always been a complex and long-term issue, especially for college students seeking fair employment opportunities (Pei & Teng, 2024). It requires not only personal career preparation but also educational institutions to provide opportunities for college students to engage in active employment preparation, such as career planning and counseling, skills training, information access, and psychological support, to achieve equal employment among the college student population. Personalized career planning services can help students clarify career goals and development paths, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the labor market. Additionally, diverse skills training

courses can improve professional skills and enhance students' soft skills and professional literacy, which are crucial for entering a diverse workplace environment. Furthermore, equitable access to information is also essential for achieving equal employment. By establishing employment information platforms and sharing resources, students can stay informed about market demands and job opportunities, build extensive professional networks, and enhance support for students' employment resources, thereby reducing information gaps (Na & Chang, 2019; Mujtaba, 2023; Tariq, 2024). Therefore, equal employment preparation requires the joint efforts of universities and students to achieve multiple layers of protection in the employment environment.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Model



**Figure 1. Research Model**

This study establishes a mediation model of career decision-making self-efficacy, in which social support and goal orientation influence job preparation behavior through career decision-making self-efficacy, as shown in Figure 1. First, social support influences career decision-making self-efficacy, a pathway based on the theoretical foundations of Zhou, Liu, Xu, and Jobe (2024) and Wang and Jiao (2022). Second, according to the studies by Myunghee, Seonghye, Dohee, and DaHyeon (2016), Do (2019), and Kim and Yoon (2019), social support also affects job preparation behavior. Third, goal orientation influences career decision-making self-efficacy (Kim, 2019) and job preparation behavior (Yun, 2017). Finally, career decision-making self-efficacy can promote job preparation behavior (Yeom, 2017; Baiyan, Xiaojing, Qun, & Yuede, 2024).

#### 3.2. Participants

This study collected questionnaires using the Wenjuanxing app, an online survey platform. Online questionnaires are cost-effective, not limited to a single location for sampling, and have the advantage of rapid data collection (Tan & Teo, 2000). Before answering the questionnaire, participants were

informed of the research objectives and target population. A total of 350 questionnaires were analyzed, with 143 male respondents (40.9%) and 207 female respondents (59.1%). The distribution by academic year was as follows: 45 first-year students (12.9%), 94 second-year students (26.9%), 127 third-year students (36.3%), and 84 fourth-year students (24.0%). In terms of academic discipline, 191 students (54.6%) were from humanities and social sciences, and 159 students (45.4%) were from natural sciences.

### 3.3. Instruments

The tools used in this study were measured using a Likert 5-point scale. The social support scale used in this study was adapted from Oh (2020), consisting of 20 items, including four sub-factors. Emotional support consisted of five items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.991. Informational support consisted of five items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.993. Material support consisted of five items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.966. Evaluative support consisted of five items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.965.

The goal orientation scale was adapted from Seon (2011), with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.934. It consisted of 10 items, including five items for mastery goals (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.993$ ) and five items for performance goals (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.993$ ).

Career decision-making self-efficacy was measured using the scale developed by Taylor and Betz (1983) and revised by Oh (2020). It consists of four factors: goal selection, career information, problem-solving, and future planning, with a total of 12 items. The goal selection factor includes three items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.922. The career information factor includes three items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.973. The problem-solving factor includes three items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.947. The future planning factor includes three items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.990.

Job preparation behavior was measured using the scale developed by Park (2018), consisting of 18 items. The scale includes three factors: information gathering behavior, tool preparation behavior, and goal attainment behavior. Information gathering behavior includes six items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.892. Tool preparation behavior includes five items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.909. Goal attainment behavior includes seven items, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.911. According to Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2009), a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  greater than 0.7 indicates good reliability of the scale.

### 3.4. Procedure

The data collected in this study were analyzed using SPSS 25.0. First, a reliability test was conducted on the collected data. Since the questionnaire used in this study involved scales from prior research with multiple factors and items, this study followed the approach of Mathieu and Farr (1991) to avoid overcomplicating the research measurement analysis due to the excessive number of factors being examined. The sub-factors of social support, goal orientation, career decision-making self-efficacy, and job preparation behavior were combined into composite factors. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the levels of social support, goal orientation, career decision-making self-efficacy, and job preparation behavior, as well as their differences across demographic variables. Subsequently, the path relationships and mediating effects between the variables were tested.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Correlation and Descriptive Analysis

**Table 1. Correlation and Summary Statistics for Variables**

Component	Social Support	Goal Orientation	Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	Career Preparation Behavior	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Support	1				3.46	0.58	0.752	0.002
Goal Orientation	.243**	1			3.03	0.75	.613	-0.003
Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	.189**	.638**	1		2.89	0.64	1.266	1.490
Career Preparation Behavior	.122*	.236**	.376**	1	2.33	0.60	0.157	-0.288

\*\*p<0.01 , \*p<0.05

In the descriptive statistical analysis, the mean values, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis are presented in Table 1. The mean value for social support is M=3.46, with a standard deviation of 0.58. The mean value for goal orientation is M=3.03, with a standard deviation of 0.75. The mean value for career decision-making self-efficacy is M=2.89, with a standard deviation of 0.64. The mean value for career preparation behavior is M=2.33, with a standard deviation of 0.60. Skewness and kurtosis values were both less than 2 and -2, confirming that the data approximates a normal distribution. The relationships between the primary variables also indicate positive correlations: social support is positively correlated with goal orientation (r=0.243), career decision-making self-efficacy (r=0.189), and career preparation behavior (r=0.122). Additionally, goal orientation is positively correlated with career decision-making self-efficacy (r=0.638) and career preparation behavior (r=0.236). Finally, career decision-making self-efficacy is positively correlated with career preparation behavior (r=0.376).

### 4.2. Analysis of Differences

**Table 2. Analysis of Differences**

Component	Category t/F	Social Support	Goal Orientation	Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	Career Preparation Behavior
Gender (M±SD)	Male(N=143)	3.89±0.37	2.92±0.6	2.84±0.54	2.24±0.53
	Female(N=207)	3.17±0.5	3.1±0.83	2.92±0.7	2.38±0.64
t		14.578***	-2.409*	-1.316	-2.144*
Grade Level (M±SD)	1(N=45)	3.22±0.05	2.89±0.62	2.84±0.58	2.23±0.48
	2(N= 94)	2.81±0.36	2.76±0.62	2.67±0.57	2.22±0.49
	3(N=127 )	3.57±0.18	3.11±0.72	2.92±0.59	2.32±0.54
	4(N=84 )	4.15±0.44	3.28±0.89	3.11±0.74	2.51±0.79
F		306.913***	8.431***	7.532***	4.250**
Academic Discipline (M±SD)	Humanities & Social Sciences (N=191)	3.44±0.56	3±0.72	2.87±0.6	2.37±0.6
	Natural Sciences (N=159)	3.49±0.59	3.06±0.79	2.91±0.69	2.27±0.6
t		-.831	-.806	-.612	1.593

\*\*\*p<0.001 , \*\*p<0.01 , \*p<0.05

To understand the differences in demographic variables across factors, t-tests were conducted for gender and academic discipline, while ANOVA was conducted for grade level, as shown in Table 2. First, significant differences were found in social support ( $t=14.578$ ), goal orientation ( $t=-2.409$ ), and career preparation behavior ( $t=-2.144$ ) between genders ( $p < 0.05$ ). Females scored higher in goal orientation ( $M=3.1$ ) and career preparation behavior ( $M=2.38$ ) than males, while males scored higher in social support ( $M=3.89$ ) than females. Regarding grade level, significant differences were found in social support ( $F=306.913$ ), goal orientation ( $F=8.431$ ), and career preparation behavior ( $F=4.250$ ) ( $p < 0.05$ ). First-year students had a mean score of 3.22 for social support, 2.89 for goal orientation, and 2.23 for career preparation behavior. Second-year students had a mean score of 2.81 for social support, 2.76 for goal orientation, and 2.22 for career preparation behavior. Third-year students scored 3.57 in social support, 3.11 in goal orientation, and 2.32 in career preparation behavior. Fourth-year students scored 4.15 in social support, 3.28 in goal orientation, and 2.51 in career preparation behavior. No significant differences were observed across variables based on academic discipline ( $p > 0.05$ ).

### 4.3. Direct Effects of Social Support, Goal Orientation, Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy, and Career Preparation Behavior

**Table 3. Analysis of Direct Effects**

Pathway		B	$\beta$	t	F	R <sup>2</sup>	VIF
Social Support	→ Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	.211	.189***	3.593	12.909	.036	1.000
Social Support	→ Career Preparation Behavior	.127	.122*	2.290	5.244	.015	1.000
Goal Orientation	→ Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	.546	.638***	15.447	238.61	.407	1.000
Goal Orientation	→ Career Preparation Behavior	.189	.236***	4.535	20.57	.056	1.000
Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	→ Career Preparation Behavior	.351	.376***	7.560	57.156	.141	1.000

\*\*\*p<0.001 , \*p<0.05

To test the path effects between variables, a regression analysis was conducted, and the results are shown in Table 3. Social support as an independent variable and career decision-making self-efficacy as a dependent variable yielded significant results,  $F=12.909$  ( $p < 0.001$ ),  $\beta=0.189$ ,  $t=3.593$ , indicating a significant positive (+) influence, with the explanatory power of the regression model being approximately 3.6%. Regarding the impact on career preparation behavior, the results were  $F=5.244$  ( $p < 0.05$ ),  $\beta=0.122$ ,  $t=2.290$ ,  $R^2=1.5\%$ , showing a significant positive (+) influence. This indicates that social support promotes both career decision-making self-efficacy and career preparation behavior. Goal orientation as an independent variable and career decision-making self-efficacy as a dependent variable also yielded significant results,  $F=238.61$  ( $p < 0.001$ ),  $\beta=0.638$ ,  $t=15.447$ ,  $R^2=40.7\%$ , showing that goal orientation significantly and positively (+) influences career decision-making self-efficacy. In the analysis of goal orientation's impact on career preparation behavior, the results were  $F=20.57$  ( $p < 0.001$ ),  $\beta=0.236$ ,  $t=4.535$ ,  $R^2=5.6\%$ , showing a significant positive (+) influence. The effect of career decision-making self-efficacy on career preparation behavior also showed significant results,  $F=57.156$  ( $p < 0.001$ ),  $\beta=0.376$ ,  $t=7.560$ , with the explanatory power of the regression model being approximately 14.1%. Therefore, career decision-making self-efficacy can also positively (+) enhance career

preparation behavior.

#### 4.4. Mediation Effect of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy between Social Support and Career Preparation Behavior

As shown in Table 4, when career decision-making self-efficacy is included in the relationship between social support and career preparation behavior, the  $\beta$  value for social support and career preparation behavior in the second stage is 0.189, with an explanatory power of 3.6%. In the third stage, when both social support and career decision-making self-efficacy predict career preparation behavior, the  $\beta$  value for social support decreases to 0.053. Although social support's effect is reduced, it still has a mediating effect, but the prediction of career preparation behavior is not significant. The prediction of career preparation behavior by career decision-making self-efficacy, however, is significant, confirming that career decision-making self-efficacy has a full mediating effect.

**Table 4. Mediation Effect Analysis of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy between Social Support and Career Preparation Behavior**

Stage	Pathway		B	S.E	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F
1	Social Support	Career					
		→ Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	.211	.059	.189***	.036	12.909
2	Social Support	Career					
		→ Preparation Behavior	.127	.055	.122*	.015	5.244
3	Social Support	Career	.055	.053	.053		
		→ Preparation Behavior	.342	.047	.366***	.144	29.128

\*\*\*p<0.001 , \*p<0.05

#### 4.5. Mediation Effect of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy between Goal Orientation and Career Preparation Behavior

When career decision-making self-efficacy is included in the relationship between goal orientation and career preparation behavior, the  $\beta$  value for goal orientation and career preparation behavior in the second stage is 0.638, with an explanatory power of 40.7%. In the third stage, when both goal orientation and career decision-making self-efficacy predict career preparation behavior, the  $\beta$  value for goal orientation decreases to -0.006. This reduction suggests the presence of a mediating effect, although goal orientation's prediction of career preparation behavior is not significant, whereas career decision-making self-efficacy's prediction is significant. Therefore, career decision-making

self-efficacy has a full mediating effect.

**Table 5. Mediation Effect Analysis of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy between Goal Orientation and Career Preparation Behavior**

Stage	Pathway		B	S.E	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F
1	Goal Orientation	→ Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	.546	.035	.638***	.407	238.61
2	Goal Orientation	→ Career Preparation Behavior	.189	.042	.236***	.056	20.57
3	Goal Orientation Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	→ Career Preparation Behavior	-.004 .355	.052 .060	-.006 .379***	.141	28.5

\*\*\*p<0.001

## 5. Conclusion

This study aims to propose strategies for promoting equal employment preparation behavior among college students. It analyzes the relationships between social support, goal orientation, career decision-making self-efficacy, and career preparation behavior, and examines the mediating effect of career decision-making self-efficacy between social support and career preparation behavior, as well as between goal orientation and career preparation behavior.

First, addressing research question 1, descriptive statistics indicate that social support (M=3.46) and goal orientation (M=3.03) are at moderate levels, while career decision-making self-efficacy (M=2.89) is on the lower end of the moderate range, and career preparation behavior (M=2.33) is the lowest among the four factors. This result suggests that while college students experience a certain level of external support and have some career goals, these may not be sufficient to fully support their career decision-making self-efficacy and career preparation behavior. Based on the analysis, many students lack confidence in their career choices and decisions, and their job preparation needs improvement. More emotional, informational, and material support may be needed, as well as further strengthening their goal orientation (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Elliot, 1999). The relatively low level of job preparation may also be due to insufficient career decision-making self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Gender differences indicate that males score higher in social support (M=3.89) than females (M=3.17), while females score higher in goal orientation (M=3.10) and career preparation behavior (M=2.38) than males (M=2.92 and M=2.24, respectively). This suggests that males are better at perceiving external

support for their job search, while females are more inclined to set clear career goals and take proactive steps to achieve them. Although there is no significant difference in career decision-making self-efficacy between genders, and both are at moderately low levels, females may compensate for this with stronger intrinsic motivation and self-motivation in goal orientation and career preparation behavior (Yu & Kim, 2022; Do, 2019; Kim & Yoon, 2019). Among grade levels, fourth-year students scored the highest in social support ( $M=4.15$ ), goal orientation ( $M=3.28$ ), career decision-making self-efficacy ( $M=3.11$ ), and career preparation behavior ( $M=2.51$ ), outperforming other groups. This may be due to the accumulation of various activities, social interactions, internships, and expanded social networks, leading to increased social support and career decision-making self-efficacy. Additionally, as graduation approaches, senior students are more motivated to explore their future careers deeply and are more proactive in their job preparation (Baiyan, Xiaojing, Qun, & Yuege, 2024; Do, 2019).

Second, the regression results for direct effects show that social support has a positive impact on career decision-making self-efficacy and career preparation behavior. Therefore, social support can help college students alleviate stress and uncertainty in career decision-making, enhance their confidence in career choices and decisions, and provide more resources and information during job preparation, thereby improving their job competitiveness. These results are consistent with the findings of Do (2019), Zhou, Liu, Xu, and Jobe (2024), and Sanghee, Jaeeun, Sungeun, and Songyi (2022). Goal orientation also positively influences career decision-making self-efficacy and career preparation behavior. As Kim (2019), Yun (2017), and Won (2015) suggest, students with clear goal orientation tend to set specific career goals, have stronger intrinsic motivation, and are more confident in their career decision-making process, focusing on specific career fields, avoiding getting lost during the job search, and thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness of job preparation. The significant impact of career decision-making self-efficacy on career preparation behavior is also consistent with the findings of Yeom (2017) and Baiyan, Xiaojing, Qun, and Yuege (2024). In the mediation effect analysis, career decision-making self-efficacy fully mediates the relationship between social support, goal orientation, and career preparation behavior, indicating that career decision-making self-efficacy is a key mediator. It explains how social support and goal orientation can promote career preparation behavior by enhancing individuals' confidence and decision-making abilities, thereby addressing research questions 2 and 3.

Finally, addressing research question 4, to improve career preparation behavior, it is essential to emphasize the importance of career decision-making self-efficacy. The results show that while social support or goal orientation can have direct effects, their influence is not sufficient. The direct effects indicate that among social support ( $\beta=.122$ ), goal orientation ( $\beta=.189$ ), and career decision-making self-efficacy ( $\beta=.376$ ) on career preparation behavior, career decision-making self-efficacy ( $\beta=.376$ ) has the highest impact. Therefore, enhancing career decision-making self-efficacy is the core pathway for promoting behavioral change. On the other hand, goal orientation should also be a focus. In this

study, the impact of goal orientation ( $\beta=.638$ ) on career decision-making self-efficacy is more prominent than that of social support ( $\beta=.122$ ), suggesting that students with high goal orientation, through improved career decision-making self-efficacy, contribute more effectively to job preparation. This situation also explains why, despite the relatively good overall level of social support ( $M=3.46$ ), the moderate level of goal orientation ( $M=3.03$ ) might not reflect a significant advantage in career decision-making self-efficacy ( $M=2.89$ ) and career preparation behavior ( $M=2.33$ ). This also aligns with the gender difference results, where males with higher social support ( $M=3.89$ ) but moderate goal orientation ( $M=2.92$ ) do not demonstrate as much effectiveness in career decision-making self-efficacy ( $M=2.92$ ) and career preparation behavior ( $M=2.24$ ) compared to females, who, despite lower social support ( $M=3.17$ ), show higher levels of goal orientation ( $M=3.10$ ) and career preparation behavior ( $M=2.38$ ). This suggests that the internal motivation driven by goal orientation may play a more critical role in fostering effective career preparation than external support alone.

In terms of grade levels, the data indicates that fourth-year students have reached an excellent level of social support ( $M=4.15$ ) and a moderate level of career decision-making self-efficacy ( $M=3.11$ ), yet there is still room for improvement in career preparation behavior ( $M=2.51$ ). This finding implies that while higher grade levels benefit from increased experience and resources, the transition to effective job preparation behavior may still require additional support, particularly in translating this support and self-efficacy into tangible actions that lead to successful employment outcomes.

Therefore, considering the perspective of equal employment, educators should encourage students to set specific, achievable short-term and long-term career goals. By focusing on clear career objectives, students can better plan their career development paths. Universities should provide comprehensive career education courses and training programs, encourage students to participate in internships, part-time jobs, and volunteer activities, and help students gain practical work experience. This approach enables students to understand their career inclinations and prepares them for their professional journey. Additionally, despite social support having a smaller impact on career decision-making self-efficacy ( $\beta=.189$ ) and career preparation behavior ( $\beta=.122$ ) compared to goal orientation ( $\beta=.638$ ) and career decision-making self-efficacy ( $\beta=.376$ ), its significance should not be overlooked. Collaborative efforts between families and schools can jointly promote students' career development by providing emotional and material support, helping students build confidence.

In enhancing career decision-making self-efficacy, the results indicate that this factor has a full mediating effect. Therefore, whether from the perspective of social support or goal orientation, career decision-making self-efficacy plays a crucial role in influencing career preparation behavior. Career guidance counselors should focus on strengthening students' career decision-making skills by teaching them how to assess their interests, abilities, and career values, enabling students to make rational career decisions based on market demands. Additionally, conducting mock interviews, career assessments, and other practical activities can help students develop their decision-making skills and their ability to face employment challenges. Universities should also establish and implement equal employment training

models to ensure that students are well-prepared in areas such as job guidance, internship opportunities, and recruitment information, while also fostering awareness and ability to protect their rights in the employment process.

This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the pathways through which social support, goal orientation, and career decision-making self-efficacy influence college students' career preparation behavior, particularly emphasizing the mediating role of career decision-making self-efficacy. Prior research has mostly focused on the independent effects of these factors. This study reveals the structural relationships between social support, goal orientation, and career decision-making self-efficacy, uncovering the multi-layered factors that impact college students' career preparation behavior. This comprehensive approach provides a deeper understanding of the challenges and motivations students face during their career preparation, guiding the development of more targeted policies and interventions.

Moreover, by confirming the importance of goal orientation and career decision-making self-efficacy in enhancing career preparation behavior, this study offers clear intervention pathways for educators and career counselors. These findings can help universities design more effective career education and guidance strategies, ultimately improving overall employment rates. Most importantly, by approaching the issue from an equal employment perspective, this study proposes strategies for enhancing college students' career preparation behavior, which not only addresses the employment discrimination challenges students face but also expands the theoretical and practical foundations of employment-related studies.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. While the analysis revealed that females generally score higher in goal orientation and career preparation behavior than males, women still face significant challenges in the job market, particularly regarding equal employment. Future research should further investigate the factors hindering women's employment and propose targeted strategies. Additionally, this study relied on surveys, which may not fully capture the actual experiences of the broader student population, and the sample size was relatively small. Future studies could enhance the feasibility of strategies in this field by incorporating other research methods such as observations and interviews, or by increasing the sample size.

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