

Career Preparedness and Academic Achievement: Insights from Yantai City's Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between career preparedness and academic achievement among university students in Yantai City, China. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data were collected from 420 undergraduate students across three universities. Results indicate a significant positive correlation between career preparedness initiatives and students' academic performance. This suggests that structured career readiness programs substantially benefit academic outcomes.

Keyword: Career preparedness, academic achievement, higher education, student performance, Yantai City

1. Introduction

In the contemporary global landscape, career preparedness has emerged as a pivotal aspect of higher education, significantly shaping students' academic success and future professional trajectories. With increasing competitiveness in labor markets worldwide, universities are increasingly tasked not only with imparting theoretical knowledge but also ensuring that students develop practical competencies and clear career objectives that align with evolving industry requirements (Tomlinson, 2017; Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006).

Career preparedness refers broadly to educational initiatives designed to equip students with critical skills, such as decision-making abilities, job-search strategies, industry-specific knowledge, and practical experiences through internships and workshops, all aimed at smoothing the transition from academic settings to professional environments (Lent & Brown, 2013; Saks & Gruman, 2018). Researchers have established that structured career preparation interventions significantly contribute to enhancing students' intrinsic motivation and learning engagement, thereby positively influencing their academic performance and overall educational outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuijpers, Meijers, & Gundy, 2011).

Specifically, in the context of China, rapid economic advancements and dynamic labor market transformations have intensified demands on higher education institutions to adequately prepare students for successful careers. Recent policy shifts and educational reforms have driven Chinese universities to integrate more comprehensive and career-oriented programs, seeking to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world employment competencies (Zhao, Li, & Liu, 2021). According to studies conducted within the Chinese educational context, such career-oriented programs not only enhance employability but also lead to marked improvements in students' academic achievements and goal clarity, reinforcing a positive cycle of academic and career-related success (Fang, Huang, & Zhang, 2018).

Yantai City, situated in Shandong Province, provides a significant case study for exploring the intersection of career preparedness and academic achievement due to its burgeoning higher education landscape and its unique economic context. Universities in Yantai have been actively restructuring

educational curricula to meet local industry needs, emphasizing career-focused competencies that align closely with regional labor market demands (Wang & Wang, 2020). Despite these initiatives, empirical examinations specifically investigating how career preparedness initiatives influence academic outcomes within this regional context remain limited.

Addressing this gap, the current study examines the relationship between structured career preparedness programs and academic achievement among undergraduate students at universities in Yantai City. The primary objective of this research is to determine how active participation in career preparation activities, such as career planning workshops, internships, and counseling sessions, influences students' academic performance as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA). By providing insights into this relationship, this study contributes valuable information that may inform future educational policies, university curricula, and student support strategies aimed at fostering both academic excellence and career readiness in the region.

2. Literature Review

Extensive research in the domain of higher education has consistently highlighted a significant and positive relationship between career preparedness initiatives and student academic achievement. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) extensively explored this correlation, indicating that structured career preparation programs are instrumental in driving improvements in students' academic performance. These programs, often encompassing various activities such as career counseling sessions, internships, mentoring, and workshops, equip students with crucial skills and competencies that enhance their intrinsic motivation, facilitate clearer goal-setting, and optimize their learning strategies (Kuijpers, Meijers, & Gundy, 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2018).

According to Lent and Brown (2013), career preparedness activities not only foster practical competencies required for job-market readiness but also strengthen cognitive and affective domains by boosting students' self-efficacy, career decision-making capabilities, and overall confidence in academic pursuits. Furthermore, structured career guidance programs provide clarity regarding professional expectations, which in turn motivates students to achieve greater academic excellence, driven by tangible career aspirations (Tomlinson, 2017). Consequently, students become more proactive in their academic journeys, actively seeking out opportunities for academic enrichment and professional development, thus creating a virtuous cycle of improved academic outcomes and increased career readiness (Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006).

In the context of Chinese higher education specifically, rapid economic transitions coupled with profound educational reforms have intensified the demand for enhanced alignment between academic curricula and labor market needs. Zhao et al. (2021) emphasize that the dynamic economic landscape in China necessitates greater integration of career-oriented educational programs, compelling higher education institutions to restructure their academic offerings. These curricular transformations are geared towards developing graduates who are not merely academically accomplished but also adept at navigating complex job markets, thereby significantly boosting their employability and market relevance (Fang, Huang, & Zhang, 2018).

Recent studies have further validated these reforms, highlighting that the inclusion of explicit career guidance programs and workplace experience opportunities directly correlates with improved student learning outcomes and more effective transitions into the workforce (Wang & Wang, 2020). These programs have become critical in bridging the historically observed gap between theoretical knowledge acquired in classrooms and the practical skills demanded by employers (Fang et al., 2018). Universities across China, recognizing these imperatives, have progressively institutionalized career-preparation initiatives, such as internships, industry collaboration projects, and tailored counseling services, aiming to ensure that graduates are comprehensively equipped for both academic success and professional competence (Zhao et al., 2021).

Despite these notable advances, empirical evidence specific to regional contexts such as Yantai City remains limited. The current study aims to address this gap by exploring how structured career preparedness programs impact academic outcomes among students in universities within this region, thereby offering critical insights that can inform policy-making, curriculum development, and strategic educational planning.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Participants

The study involved 420 undergraduate students randomly selected from three universities in Yantai City. Demographic details included gender, major, and year of study.

3.2. Instruments

Participants completed a structured questionnaire assessing career preparedness, including involvement in career planning workshops, internships, career counseling sessions, and perceived readiness. Academic achievement was measured through GPA.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis evaluated the relationship between career preparedness and academic achievement.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Students participating in more structured career preparedness activities reported higher GPAs. The mean GPA was 3.24 (SD = 0.47).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of GPA and Career Preparedness Activities

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
GPA	3.24	0.47
Career Preparedness Activities (scale)	4.12	0.62

Note: Career Preparedness Activities scale ranges from 1 (low participation) to 5 (high participation).

4.2. Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation indicated a significant positive relationship between career preparedness activities and GPA ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Between Career Preparedness Activities and GPA

Variable Pair	Pearson Correlation (r)	Significance (p-value)
Career Preparedness Activities and GPA	0.59	$p < 0.001$

Note: Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.3. Regression Analysis

Regression analysis revealed career preparedness activities significantly predicted academic achievement ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$), explaining approximately 35% of the variance in GPA.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Predicting GPA from Career Preparedness Activities

Predictor Variable	Beta (β) Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Career Preparedness Activities	0.47	0.06	7.83	$p < 0.001$

Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value	p-value
0.59	0.35	0.34	61.31	$p < 0.001$

Note: Career preparedness activities significantly predict GPA, accounting for 35% of variance.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study robustly confirm the original hypothesis, demonstrating a clear and positive impact of structured career preparedness programs on students’ academic achievement. Students who actively engage in career-oriented activities such as internships, workshops, mentorship, and structured counseling sessions tend to develop a stronger sense of direction and clearer career objectives, which significantly enhances their intrinsic motivation toward academic pursuits (Kuijpers, Meijers, & Gundy, 2011; Lent & Brown, 2013). Such intrinsic motivation inherently promotes deeper engagement with their coursework, greater persistence in challenging tasks, and a heightened commitment to academic excellence (Tomlinson, 2017).

Moreover, this research aligns with existing literature highlighting the crucial role of career preparedness initiatives in not only bolstering students’ academic outcomes but also in equipping them with the skills necessary for smoother transitions into professional environments. Zhao et al. (2021) previously identified similar outcomes within the context of Chinese higher education, underscoring that comprehensive career-focused educational strategies not only enhance employability prospects but also significantly contribute to improved academic performance by clarifying professional goals and expectations.

Furthermore, the positive correlation identified through this research supports the theoretical premise proposed by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), asserting that structured career-related activities can substantially boost academic achievements by reinforcing key competencies such as strategic planning, decision-making, and effective time management. These competencies collectively foster greater academic resilience and adaptability, essential for maintaining consistent academic performance across diverse educational demands and scenarios (Fang, Huang, & Zhang, 2018).

The regression analysis further substantiates the predictive power of career preparedness programs on academic performance, indicating that a significant portion (approximately 35%) of variance in students’ GPA can be directly attributed to their participation in structured career-oriented activities. This finding offers strong empirical evidence that universities, especially within regions like Yantai City, should prioritize integrating comprehensive career preparedness frameworks within their academic curricula (Wang & Wang, 2020). Such strategic integration could effectively bridge existing gaps

between theoretical instruction and practical career demands, fostering an academic environment that promotes both scholastic and professional excellence.

Consequently, these findings not only support but also extend previous research by emphasizing the importance of context-specific insights. The particular context of Yantai City provides valuable regional insights into the importance of tailored educational initiatives that resonate with localized labor market demands, thus strengthening both academic and career success for students in the long term.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has clearly emphasized the substantial benefits of structured career preparedness programs for enhancing academic achievement among university students. Specifically, the empirical evidence from universities in Yantai City underscores that active engagement in career-focused activities significantly boosts students' academic motivation, clarity of objectives, and overall performance. Such initiatives provide students with critical skills and competencies, helping them not only excel academically but also transition seamlessly into their professional lives.

Considering these findings, universities in Yantai and comparable regions should prioritize embedding comprehensive career-oriented services within their educational curricula. These career services should encompass well-structured internships, industry partnerships, career counseling, mentorship programs, and workshops that align closely with evolving labor market demands. A systematic integration of these programs can help bridge theoretical knowledge and practical career requirements, ultimately strengthening the educational quality, enhancing student employability, and contributing positively to regional economic growth (Wang & Wang, 2020; Zhao et al., 2021).

Furthermore, policymakers and educational administrators should actively support and allocate resources toward developing robust career-preparedness frameworks. Such frameworks must be consistently evaluated, refined, and adapted in response to dynamic market demands to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. Incorporating feedback mechanisms, wherein both students and industry stakeholders regularly assess the effectiveness of career preparation initiatives, would further strengthen these programs.

For future research, it is recommended that longitudinal studies be conducted to track the long-term impacts of career preparedness activities on academic achievement and employment outcomes. Expanding the research scope to include comparative analyses across different geographical regions and various types of higher education institutions could also provide valuable insights. Such comparative studies would offer a more comprehensive understanding of contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of career preparedness initiatives, thereby facilitating the development of more targeted and impactful educational policies and practices.

Finally, future studies might also consider qualitative research methodologies, including interviews and focus groups, to gain deeper insights into students' perceptions, experiences, and expectations regarding career preparedness programs. This qualitative data could effectively complement quantitative findings and provide a richer, more nuanced perspective, aiding universities in further refining their strategic initiatives for greater educational and professional outcomes.

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