

A study of career planning and autonomy among university students: an investigation from the higher education learning crisis

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Abstract. Globally, college students commonly experience this dual challenge of high levels of involution during their studies and high pressure for future employment. Through an in-depth study of the correlation between career planning and learning autonomy among university students, this study found that the majority of students are satisfied with their majors, but suffer from the anxiety that their learning is not related to practice. Career development course learning and autonomy play an important role in career planning, but there is still a lack of understanding and participation among students. Schools should provide more career planning and self-development courses to develop students' autonomy and provide more support and resources to help students discover their interests and values for better career planning.

Keywords: career planning, autonomy, learning crisis.

1. Introductory

Globally, university students are experiencing the dual challenges of high levels of inward mobility during their studies and high pressure to find employment in the future. The global financial crisis has led to the evolution of higher education in China from "elite education" to "mass education", triggering a large-scale expansion of colleges and universities, a surge in the number of college students, and white-hot competition. In this competitive job market, only a very few outstanding graduates can be successfully employed, many graduates are lost, some are still unsatisfied with their jobs and consider choosing a new career or industry, and some even have difficulty in finding a job or are unemployed for a long time. The issue of college students' career planning has aroused widespread concern and discussion in contemporary society. The essence of career planning in higher education is to manage students' goals and enhance their competitiveness by combining their own characteristics under the specific environment of the times [1]. Many higher education institutions in China have taken appropriate measures to address this issue. These academic institutions offer relevant courses and plan special lectures and seminars, while the Internet provides a large number of relevant resources. Most of these resources focus on guiding university students to develop their own career plans and career development strategies. There is a lack of cultivation of students' autonomy. This will have a negative impact on career planning education.

Students can have a better understanding of themselves and help in career planning and implementation only after they have fully demonstrated their talents in independent learning and continuous exploration. The research on the correlation will help higher education institutions to improve the quality of education. This study will investigate and analyse the relationship between career planning and autonomy in order to better understand the inherent patterns and provide practical recommendations for university students and educational institutions.

2. Literature review

Learning crisis research originated in the early 20th century. Early studies focused on the concepts of learning disabilities and learning difficulties, usually involving dyslexia, learning disabilities, and other physical or psychological problems[2]. However, in recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on the intrinsic connection between students' non-intellectual factors and learning, especially

on psychological characteristics such as personality traits, rebellious tendencies and emotional stability[3]. With the in-depth study of cognitive psychology, the study of learning crisis has been gradually extended to the learning process including multiple factors such as cognition and emotion[4].

In recent years, scholars have deeply explored the issue of learning crisis from multiple perspectives, such as social and cultural, in order to form a more comprehensive view[5-6]. Among them, the GPA, which originated in Europe and the United States, has become a new system of academic evaluation for college students and the phenomenon of grade inflation has emerged[7], which has caused a high degree of inward scrolling among college students in order to achieve a higher GPA, and brought significant challenges to students' learning. The major challenge - whether to focus on school curriculum learning and obtaining high grades, or to focus on employability development - has become a dilemma for students' personal planning during university. Tan Xinyuan et al.[8] argued that "inward scrolling", "Buddhist" and "lying flat" intuitively reflect the phenomenon of excessive or insufficient struggle motivation of young people, which affects the rationality of young people and the development of the spirit of struggle. However, the employment of graduates is affected by many factors.

However, the employment of graduates is affected by many factors. Chen Kun[9] et al.'s survey on the employment flow of fresh graduates of Anhui University of Architecture shows that the majors, social and family backgrounds of fresh graduates affect their employment willingness, employment concepts and employment standards to a certain extent. Through further cross-comparison analyses, it is found that the concept of major, employment expectation, employment concept, the factor of place of origin, family factor and gender are important factors influencing the employment flow of fresh graduates.

Against the background of universalisation of higher education in western countries, the number of university graduates has been increasing rapidly, increasing employment pressure and highlighting problems in learning[10]. Li Zhengwei[11] et al.'s study showed that college students' interpersonal communication skills and job-seeking mentality have the most significant impact on their employment competitiveness, while professional performance, although it has a positive impact on employment competitiveness, does not play a significant role.

Although the career planning education for college students in China has been developed, the current career planning education faces the challenge of backward concepts[12]. For example, in 2009, Central South University for Nationalities conducted a survey on all 2008 students, and the results showed that only 11.78% of the students paid attention to "career development and planning" and took the initiative to understand the relevant information. In addition, related research is still facing the problems of insufficient depth of theoretical research, lack of in-depth analysis, single research method, and lack of operability in teaching and education reform research[12].

Strengthening college students' education on career planning is considered one of the key elements in solving the current employment difficulties and involution of college graduates. There has been more progress in research on topics such as college students' sense of career choice efficacy, career interest, career values, and employability, and a number of related tools for measuring career education have been developed. For example, Career Maturity "Progress of Research on Career Maturity of College Students in China"[13], Career Adaptability "Current Situation and Exploration of College Students' Career Adaptability"[14], Internship Satisfaction "Survey and Analysis of College Students' Satisfaction with Professional Internships"[15], and other related tools, which are of great value to career research. Wu Wei [16] conducted a questionnaire survey on the current situation of college students' career planning in some colleges and universities in Shanghai, and found that in the process of college students' career planning, there are problems such as weak awareness of career planning, weak self-knowledge, and inadequate career counselling in colleges and universities. Among them, self-knowledge is related to self-awareness and autonomy. Chen Yi's[17] research shows that autonomous learning is not only conducive to improving students' academic performance, but also the basis for lifelong learning and lifelong development of individuals. Occupational

autonomy is manifested in the individual's initiative in choosing a career, that is, choosing a career based on personal interest, will and standards, so as to achieve the purpose of independent career development.

The development of autonomous personality can promote college students' career planning. According to Li Yongtian[18], the main difficulties and challenges encountered by contemporary college students in autonomous learning are; weak willingness to learn autonomously; relatively low ability to learn autonomously; the willingness of college students to learn autonomously should be improved; and the ability to learn autonomously should be enhanced. Personality is the result of the interaction between genetics, environment and education, and it consists of a series of relatively stable psychological characteristics. The development of autonomous personality is closely related to the life and environment of individuals, including the over-emphasis of family and the over-management of school teachers[19]. The cultivation of autonomy should be an important part of career planning education, but the relationship between the two is still unclear. Few scholars are currently conducting research on the relationship between the level of career planning and implementation and students' academic autonomy. Therefore, this study will conduct an empirical research on this issue.

3. Research design

3.1. research problem

Along with the increasingly serious employment problem of college students, career planning has gradually been taken seriously. More and more tertiary institutions have begun to popularise the education on career planning for university students, so as to help students better plan their careers. However, even after receiving career planning education, whether students can get rid of the learning crisis, have a clear understanding and correct knowledge of their careers, as well as whether students are able to establish a sense of autonomy and stick well to it in the real learning process, are likely to be the key to their future development. For this reason, this study proposes to examine the following questions:

- (1) The prevalence of learning crisis among college students;
- (2) The current status and problems of university students' knowledge and implementation of career planning;
- (3) The relationship between the current status of learning autonomy, and the implementation of personal career planning.

3.2. research target

In this study, a total of 218 university students from several provinces, including Shandong, Guangdong, and Sichuan, were surveyed by questionnaire, 110 in arts, 92 in science, and 16 in others. Three students from different universities in Shandong and one international student from a Korean university were interviewed. Their majors include railway management, radio and television choreography, hospitality management, marketing, two in their fourth year of college, one in their third year of college, and one who has graduated.

3.3. Research Methods

Research on the career planning and learning autonomy of college students was conducted to collect relevant information. Interview method and questionnaire method are used to explore the relationship between career planning and autonomous learning of college students and the correlation between them. A variety of survey methods, including questionnaires and face-to-face interviews, were used to gain a comprehensive understanding of college students' career planning awareness, behaviour and level of learning autonomy. Through the use of statistical analysis and data mining techniques, this study conducted an in-depth study of the collected information, explored the correlation between college students' career planning and their learning autonomy, and analysed the factors that might have led to this correlation. We conducted an in-depth study of some successful

cases of university students' career planning and explored how they achieved their career planning goals through autonomous learning.

4. Data Analysis

The researcher analysed the data from the questionnaire and found that the total number of questionnaires filled out was 251, of which 33 invalid questionnaires were excluded, and 218 valid questionnaires were finally obtained. Among them, the proportion of men and women is basically equal, 48.17% of men and 51.83% of women. Only 3.67% of the survey questionnaire subjects in their grades have graduated, 96.33% of the university students in school. Most of the questionnaire respondents were sophomores and juniors, accounting for 37.16 per cent and 34.86 per cent respectively. The number of students in arts and sciences is basically the same.

4.1. The prevalence of learning crises

Since most of the respondents to the questionnaire were current students, in general they were satisfied with their current major, accounting for 51.38 per cent of the total. Only 5.5 per cent were clearly dissatisfied with their current majors. This shows that the majority of the current students, 94.5 per cent of the total, are satisfied with their majors.

As for the reasons for students to choose their majors, the data from the questionnaire found that most of the students chose the majors that they like and understand, which accounted for 43.58%, which can explain the reason why the students are relatively satisfied with the majors that they are currently studying. However, more than 20% of the students followed the advice of their friends, relatives or teachers, and only about 11% of the students chose their majors by transfer or randomly. The percentage of those who took popular majors as the criteria for major selection was 20%.

Around 90% of students think that what they learn in college is useful to them, and only 10% think it is not. This is basically the same as the data on major satisfaction, which has some correlation.

In the question of being able to apply what they have learnt in practice, 86% of the students think that they can do so, but the number of students choosing "in line with" is decreasing compared with the professional satisfaction and the belief that what they have learnt is useful, and students lack confidence in applying the knowledge in practice. Moreover, the majority of students think that what they learnt at school is not in line with practice, and about 87% of them have anxiety that what they learnt is not relevant in practice.

Around 90% of the students have a positive attitude towards learning in terms of course selection by taking the initiative to choose the courses they want to take. However, 25% of the students who chose the courses they wanted to take said that they had poor grades and were anxious and confused about the future. And there are also 42% of students who said that although their grades are good, they are still confused about the future, not knowing what kind of job they should take up, and there is confusion. Only 32 per cent of students had the right attitude to learning, but realistically had good grades and felt confident that they could be confident about the future.

The in-depth interviews showed that of the four interviewed students (A, B, C, and D), only student C chose a major that he or she understood and was interested in, while the other three (A, B, and D) chose their majors on the advice of their families. Interviewed college student A had said on the question of whether he had ever felt confused about the future during his college years, "My ultimate goal since school was to get into college, and after the college entrance examination I chose my major on the advice of my family, and at that time, I did not know what the major was about, nor did I know the specific direction of employment, so during college I only thought about trying to improve my grades, and I felt confused about the future. " The major that he or she did not understand led interviewed student A to be confused about the future, pursuing higher grades while neglecting his or her own interests and self-development, reflecting the problem of balance between grades and personal development. More support and resources are needed to help students discover their interests and values in order to better plan their careers.

4.2. Career Development Programme of Study

The data from the questionnaire found that nearly 60 per cent of the students changed their study status to cope with the future after entering the university and knowing more about the outside world. about 77 per cent of the students had knowledge of the future employment situation, but still about 23 per cent of the students did not know about it.

Around 90 per cent of the students think that career planning courses for college students are important, but around 10 per cent of the students think that they are not important. Moreover, the study found that 90% of these 10% of students do not understand the employment situation. 30% of students have not participated in career planning courses, and these students are not only freshmen and sophomores, but also about 30% of students in each grade who have not participated in career planning courses.

More than 50% of the students have vague plans for the future, 8% have no plans, 60% of the students with vague plans have not participated in career planning courses, and 90% of the students with no plans have not participated in career planning courses.

Nearly 90% of the students did not have social practice in line with their majors during their studies. During their studies, students learnt professional knowledge that they considered useful, but they did not have access to career practice that was in line with what they had learnt, resulting in the majority of students indicating that there was a lack of practical experience, contradiction between their major and their planning, and a lack of understanding when planning their careers.

The in-depth interviews showed that all four interviewed students (A, B, C, and D) had a certain degree of understanding of the current employment situation. Interviewed student B said, "I think the university can provide more career planning and self-development courses to help students understand how to set goals, make decisions, and pursue their interests. In addition, provide more mentoring and counselling support to help students better understand their potential and career options." Universities should not be a fortress for college students, but should provide more information about careers, provide more ways for students to practice, and allow students to learn more about external industry information in a timely manner.

4.3. Autonomy

The statistical results of the questionnaire show that about 87 per cent of students use their own interests and values as reference in career planning, while about 13 per cent do not. Most students give priority to their own interests and values in career planning, but the process of career planning is influenced by external factors. Nearly 50% of the students said that they listened to the advice of their family members and teachers to make plans, 36% of them made plans according to their own professional abilities, and 13% of them made plans according to the pressure of employment in the society.

According to the statistical results of the questionnaire, more than 85% of the students said that they have an assessment of their own ability and knowledge, have a clearer understanding of themselves and make corresponding plans, take the initiative to seek learning and development opportunities related to their career planning, actively participate in relevant practical activities to improve their practical ability, put their energy into improving their future career ability, and make clear career plans and then implement them according to the plan. However, it is not clear whether students can improve their future career ability. Most of the students have recognised that they are going to face difficult career development challenges, and they are also consciously carrying out relevant practices.

The in-depth interviews showed that among the four interviewed students (A, B, C, D), Interviewed Students A, B, and C believed that autonomy is important in college students' career planning, but only Interviewed Student C made career planning based on his own interest, during which he had received opposition from his family, and finally achieved his goal planning by obtaining his family's approval through his own efforts. Interviewed students A and B gave up career planning based on their own interests due to family and social factors, and chose more stable jobs. Interviewed

student D, on the other hand, thinks that autonomy is not important in college students' career planning. Student D said, "I have thought about jobs I am interested in and suitable for during my college years, but I think it is difficult for undergraduates to find an ideal job after graduation, so I might as well listen to my parents' opinions and suggestions, which will enable me to take a lot of detours less often." Schools should strengthen the cultivation of students' autonomy to cope with the influence of external factors on college students' career planning.

5. Conclusion and discussion

5.1. Main findings

Based on the findings of the data analysis, the main conclusions of this study are as follows:

(1) In terms of the prevalence of learning crisis, most of the students are satisfied with their studies and their majors. Their main factors in choosing their majors were interest and understanding, and they believed that what they learnt would be useful for the future. However, a portion of the students lacked the confidence to apply what they had learnt in practice and many believed that schooling was not relevant to real needs, leading to the existence of a certain degree of anxiety.

(2) The key findings regarding the study of career development courses show that most students consider career planning courses to be crucial. However, a portion of students lacked understanding of the employment situation and questioned the importance of these courses. Also, there were students who had not yet attended a career planning course, including those in different grades, which could have an impact on their future planning. In addition, it was found that most of the students felt vague about their future career plans and even some of them did not make clear plans, most of which had not been exposed to career planning courses. Most importantly, students often lacked practical social experience related to their field of study during their university years, which posed challenges and difficulties in their career planning process. These results emphasise the importance of providing more comprehensive career planning education and more practical opportunities to help students better prepare for their future careers.

(3) Key findings on autonomy include the fact that most students base their career planning on their own interests and values, while another group of students base their planning on professional competence, family and teacher advice, and a smaller number of students base their planning on societal employment pressures. The majority of students believed that they had the ability and knowledge to conduct career assessment, they had clear goals for career planning, and they actively pursued relevant learning and practice opportunities. However, there were differences in students' perceptions and practices of autonomy, and external factors could also have an impact on their decision-making. Findings from the in-depth interviews further emphasised the role of family and social factors in students' career planning, and suggested that schools should provide more career planning and self-development programmes to encourage students to actively pursue their personal interests and values, as well as more practical opportunities to reduce students' uncertainty and anxiety in planning.

5.2. Discussion

College students often face the problem of insufficient self-decision-making ability when choosing employment, lack a perfect autonomous personality, rely excessively on social relations such as parents, relatives, and friends, or hold a passive wait-and-see attitude. This is an essential factor leading to the poor career autonomy of college students. Insufficient vocational independence of university students will affect the results expected by university students in their future jobs.

Career planning is not an externally imposed program but an individual design driven by intrinsic motivation and considering the actual conditions, opportunities, social and professional needs, and social interests. College students lack autonomy in career planning, but an autonomous personality has a positive effect on college students' career planning.

Based on the findings of the above study, the following are some of the issues that need to be discussed:

1) Relationship between academic satisfaction and practical application: Although most students are satisfied with their studies and profession, why do some of them still lack the confidence to apply what they have learned in practice? How does this satisfaction relate to practical career development?

2) Effectiveness of Career Planning Courses: Although most students believe that career planning courses are essential, why do some doubt their importance? Do these programs help to improve students' career planning skills?

3) Ambiguity of future career plans: why do most students feel ambiguous about their plans? Do they need more guidance and support to clarify their career goals?

4) Lack of social practice and planning challenges: How does students' lack of practical social experience related to their field of study affect their career planning process? Should schools provide more opportunities for students to apply what they have learned in actual practice?

5) Autonomy and external influences: why do students' autonomy vary in their career planning? How do external factors, such as family and societal pressures, influence their decision-making process? How can schools help students better pursue their interests and values?

These issues can be used as a direction for further research and to help schools and providers better meet the career planning needs of students and provide more targeted support and resources.

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