Opportunities in International Educational Programs in the Emerging Country

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Abstract

This study explores career trends and opportunities for students in international programs within developing countries, with a focus on the factors that influence career expectations in the digital age. The research aims to (1) examine how demographic factors such as gender, age, and economic status, along with technology usage, shape career aspirations, and (2) identify the interplay between these factors in influencing career expectations. A total of 1,230 participants from Thailand were surveyed, with a pilot study of 668 respondents conducted to refine the survey instrument. The data were analyzed using logistic regression to assess the impact of various predictors on students' career goals.

The findings revealed that; 1. Gender played a significant role in career preferences, with males more likely to choose international programs compared to females. 2. Younger participants exhibited higher career expectations, while financial capacity emerged as a key factor in shaping career ambitions. 3. Technology usage, including internet access, social media skills, and digital device use, was strongly linked to elevated career expectations, with both the amount of time spent online and the cost of internet usage influencing these expectations. These findings highlight the importance of promoting technology engagement and developing policies that better equip students for the demands of the digital workforce.

Keywords: Career Prospects; Post-graduation Expectations; Digital Age; Gender Disparities; Technology Engagement

Introduction

Education is increasingly recognized as a critical investment in human development, significantly impacting individuals' skills, knowledge, and future potential. By providing access to quality education, we can cultivate a more capable workforce that benefits not only individuals but also organizations and societies as a whole. The role of education extends beyond personal development, contributing to economic growth by enhancing productivity and efficiency in various sectors (Bau et al., 2020; Goldin, 2024; Kuzmin et al., 2020). In the context of a rapidly evolving digital landscape, digital technologies are reshaping daily life, driving the expansion of the digital economy, and transforming labor markets. However, these advancements require increasingly sophisticated skills, while also exacerbating inequalities between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not (WEF, 2020). As automation is predicted to displace millions of jobs in the coming years, especially those involving low-skilled labor (Bork, 2018; Frey & Osborne, 2017), skill development has become more critical than ever. In response to these changes, Thailand has established a growing number of international schools, offering more affordable educational opportunities that help students build the necessary skills for career success in the digital age.

The growing importance of digital tools in shaping career expectations has been well documented in developed countries, but there is a noticeable gap in research focused on emerging economies, particularly among students enrolled in international programs. As Thailand adapts to global digital trends, it has seen a significant rise in the number of international schools, a shift that has created new opportunities for students to gain exposure to diverse educational models. These schools offer a more cost-effective alternative to studying abroad while fostering valuable networks that can boost career prospects (Samrit, 2017). The target group for this research consists of students enrolled in international programs in Thailand, who are navigating the intersection of demographic factors, economic conditions, and cultural influences in shaping their career aspirations. While much of the existing literature focuses on the role of education in developed economies, there is a need for a deeper understanding of how technological advancements and socio-economic variables affect the career expectations of students in emerging markets. This research also aims to investigate how gender, age, and financial factors intersect with digital connectivity in influencing career trajectories.

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly impacted all aspects of life, including education, where technology plays an increasingly central role. This research is important as it aims to address the knowledge gap regarding the effects of technological change in developing countries. It seeks to provide insights into how these changes influence students in international programs, and it will offer recommendations for the development of educational policies that are aligned with the evolving needs of the labor market. The study's findings will contribute to shaping educational strategies that better prepare students for future career opportunities in a digitalized world.

Existing studies primarily focus on developed countries, leaving a substantial gap in understanding how emerging economies, such as Thailand, adapt to and are affected by digital trends. There is limited empirical evidence on the intersection between socio–economic variables and digital access in shaping students' career plans, particularly within international education contexts. Addressing this gap will contribute significantly to policy development and educational planning in developing countries.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders aiming to prepare students effectively for digital–era careers. The findings will help formulate strategies that enhance digital literacy and inclusivity, thus promoting equitable career development opportunities.

Research Objectives

This research investigates career trends and opportunities for students enrolled in international programs in developing countries, focusing on the key factors that shape career expectations in the digital era.

Review of The Literature

1. Career Choice Theory

Technological advancements, particularly the rise of the Internet, have revolutionized global connectivity, enabling faster and more efficient economic activities in the digital economy (Buker & Bal, 2018). Digital tools like smartphones, laptops, and tablets have facilitated seamless communication, driving the rapid growth of the digital economy with low operational costs. Core components such as the Internet and information technology are essential to this expansion, reshaping the way we work and

live. Career Choice Theory highlights the dynamic nature of career planning, where individuals must evaluate their strengths and weaknesses to leverage opportunities for growth (Altan, 2021). Careers, unlike jobs or professions, represent long–term trajectories of professional development, shaped by experiences and personal fulfillment (Yates & Oliveria, 2016). Technological advancements have influenced career planning, which is now a critical process of setting goals and defining one's potential. Culture plays a significant role in career choices, with societal norms and cultural values shaping decisions, especially in the workplace (Okutan & Akbas, 2019). In the context of globalization, careers are increasingly shaped by cultural backgrounds, impacting job selection, education, and professional development. Gender also significantly influences career choices, particularly in male–dominated fields, with cultural norms and societal expectations restricting women's access to certain careers (Angwaomaodoko, 2023).

2. Human Capital Theory

Education is widely regarded as an investment in human capital, offering both financial and non–financial benefits. Financially, it provides increased income potential, while non–financially, it enhances career opportunities, social integration, and overall life satisfaction (Chemsripong, 2019). Education is not simply a service; it is a production process that fosters the development of individuals. Instead of producing tangible products, the educational system creates human capital—individuals who contribute to economic productivity. Modern economists view education as a key driver of economic growth, as it directly impacts the productive efficiency of workers. The concept of education as an investment is rooted in its ability to enhance the skills and knowledge needed for individuals to contribute meaningfully to the economy. Investments in education, such as schooling, empower individuals to become more productive, adapt to technological advancements, and navigate a rapidly changing global environment. Educated individuals are better equipped to process and share information, increasing their work efficiency and earning potential. As such, investing in education leads to the development of human capital, which in turn raises productivity, earning potential, and overall economic growth. This highlights the crucial role education plays in fostering both individual and societal development (Namraksa & Kraiwanit, 2024).

Conceptual Framework

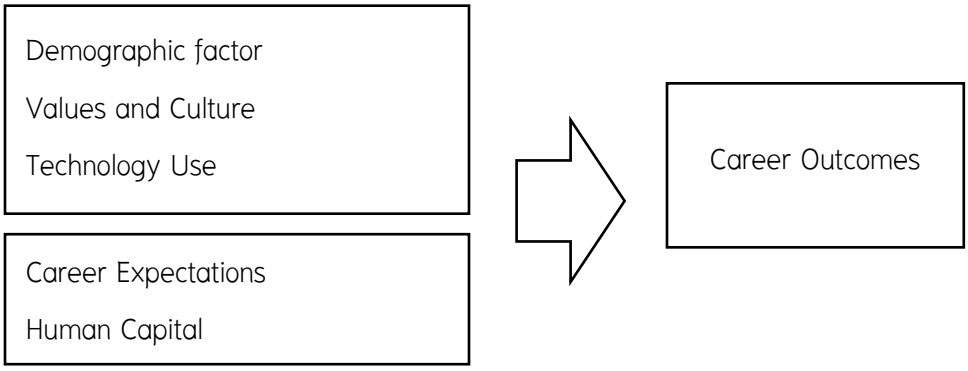

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This research, titled Career Prospects and Opportunities in International Programs within the Emerging Country, utilized a quantitative methodology that relied on structured surveys with predetermined responses to collect data. The data were collected from September 2024 to December 2024. The population consists of Thai individuals aged 18 years and older who are currently studying in international programs. A pilot study involving 668 participants was conducted to refine the survey instrument, in accordance with the recommendations of Sitthipon et al. (2022). The measurement tools were assessed for reliability, validity, and accuracy. To meet ethical standards, the survey was approved by five experts in education and social sciences, ensuring its suitability. Individuals under 18 years of age were excluded from the study. All participants received clear explanations of the study's objectives and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, consistent with the ethical guidelines established by Jangjarat et al. (2023). Only respondents who completed the entire survey were included, effectively filtering out incomplete responses.

The research targeted Thai residents aged 18 and above. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula, aiming for a significance level of 0.05, a margin of error of ±5%, and a 95% confidence level, as recommended by Limna et al. (2022) and Thetlek et al. (2023), which resulted in a minimum sample size of 384 individuals. Ultimately, 1,230 participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Data analysis was performed using statistical software, employing both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, summarized the demographic characteristics of the participants. Inferential statistics, such as chi–square

tests and logistic regression, were utilized to explore associations and make predictions regarding the outcome variable based on the predictor variables. Logistic regression analysis examined the relationship between predictor variables and the outcome variable. Initially, a baseline model was established with only the constant term, followed by the inclusion of additional predictor variables to assess their contributions to the prediction of the outcome variable. The effectiveness of the logistic regression models was evaluated using various statistical measures, including classification tables, which helped assess model fit, overall predictive power, and the percentage of correct predictions.

Research Results

From a sample of 1,230 participants – excluding those who have already graduated and are currently employed – 668 respondents were high school graduates or current students from both Thai and international programs (Inter; 0 = International Program, 1 = Thai Program, including bilingual programs). The expected careers are presented in the following table.

Table 1 Percentage Distribution by Prospect Career

Expected Career	Frequency	Percent
Salary Man (1)	511	76.5
Start-up and freelance (0)	157	23.5
Total	668	100.0

The survey results from a sample of 668 respondents reveal that 76.5% of respondents expect to pursue careers as salaried employees, commonly referred to as "Salary Man", after graduation. Meanwhile, 23.5% of respondents express a desire to become start-up business owners or engage in freelance work. These findings suggest that the majority of students are inclined towards traditional employment, while a smaller group prefers entrepreneurial or independent career paths. These findings highlight the diverse range of career aspirations among the respondents.

Table 2 Omnibus Test of the Model's Performance Using All the Independent Variables

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	555.601	21	.000
	Block	555.601	21	.000
	Model	555.601	21	.000

As depicted in Table 1, the chi-square value of 555.601 exceeds the critical value at a significance level of 0.05, given the presence of 21 degrees of freedom. This finding indicates that the dependent variable is significantly influenced by all the independent variables included in the model. This suggests that the combined effect of the independent variables is substantial in determining the outcome of the dependent variable.

Table 3 The Model Summary Using All the Independent Variables

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	1056.578[a]	.363	.498

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

A statistical model (possibly regression) is presented in Table 3. The model has an R-squared value of 0.498, indicating that it explains approximately 49.8% of the variation in the dependent variable. Additionally, the significance value of 0.05 suggests that the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable are statistically significant at the 5% level.

Table 4 Classification Table for Back-Testing (Including All the Independent Variables)

Observed			Predicted		
			Salary man		Percentage correct
			No	Yes	
Step 1	Salary man	No	70	87	44.6
		Yes	24	487	95.3
	Overall percentage				83.4

a. The cut value is .500

As indicated in Table 4, the classification results reveal that the model – incorporating all potential independent variables – demonstrates the capability to predict the key factors that influence an individual's decision to choose a career as a salary man, achieving an accuracy rate of 84.8% for cases, using a cut-off value of 0.500 (or 50%).

Table 5 *Coefficients of the Logistic Regression Model With All Independent Variables*

Independent Variables		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	Gender (X1)	1.247	.187	44.389	1	.000	3.481
	Age (X2)	−1.258	.113	123.672	1	.000	.284
	Monthly income and other income sources (X3)	−.497	.142	12.169	1	.000	.609
	Professional Identity: School provides learners with specific skills and expertise (V1)	−.061	.161	.144	1	.705	.941
	Values and Culture: Consideration of public and national interests over personal interests (V2)	.216	.125	2.981	1	.084	1.241
	Values and Culture: Honesty, sacrifice, perseverance, and ideals for the common good (V3)	−.275	.150	3.358	1	.067	.760
	Values and Culture: Preservation of beautiful Thai traditions, morality, and integrity (V4)	−.501	.148	11.413	1	.001	.606
	Social Media Platform (X5)	−.454	.115	15.607	1	.000	.635
	Desktop Computer (X6)	1.528	.232	43.468	1	.000	4.609
	Notebook (X7)	1.301	.256	25.842	1	.000	3.672
	Smartphone (X8)	.023	.648	.001	1	.972	1.023
	Tablet/iPad (X9)	−.308	.198	2.420	1	.120	.735
	Wearable Device (X10)	−.607	.187	10.540	1	.001	.545
	Internet usage period (X11)	.343	.103	10.995	1	.001	1.409
	Average hours of use per day (X12)	−.347	.140	6.131	1	.013	.707
	Monthly home internet expenditure (X13)	.670	.139	23.045	1	.000	1.953
	Monthly mobile internet expenditure (X14)	.460	.129	12.797	1	.000	1.584
	Constant	−.665	1.214	.300	1	.584	.514

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: X1, X2, X3, V1, V2, V3, V4, X5, X6, X7, X8, X9, X10, X11, X12, X13, X14

The predictive regression equation of Model 1 using the coefficients from Table 5 can be described by the following equation:

$$P = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-z}}$$

where P is Expected Career Salary man, and Z = – 0.665 + 1.247(X1) –1.258(X2) – 0.497(X3) – 0.501(V4) – 0.454(X5) +1.528(X6) + 1.301(X7) – 0.607(X10) + 0.343(X11) + 0.670(X13) + 0.406(X14).

The statistical significance of each independent variable is elucidated in Table 5. The findings reveal that, concerning the dependent variable which is an individual's expected career salary man, gender, age, monthly income and other income sources, values and culture, social media platform, desktop computer, notebook, wearable device, internet usage period, monthly home internet expenditure, and monthly mobile internet expenditure are identified as significant contributors. In particular, when gender was changed from female (coded as 0) to male (coded as 1), the expected career of salaried employees increased by 3.481. In other words, the study found that men were more likely than women to choose careers as salaried employees. Additionally, a one–unit increase in age decreased the career expectation for salaried employees from 1 to 0.248, representing a decrease of 0.752. A one–unit increase in monthly income decreased the career expectation for salaried employees from 1 to 0.609, which corresponds to a decrease of 0.391. Similarly, a one–unit increase in values and culture decreased the career expectation for salaried employees from 1 to 0.606, indicating a decrease of 0.394. A one–unit increase in social media platform use also decreased the career expectation for salaried employees from 1 to 0.635, representing a decrease of 0.365. Conversely, a one–unit increase in desktop computer use significantly increased the career expectation for salaried employees by 4.609 units. A one–unit increase in notebook use raised the career expectation for salaried employees by as much as 3.672 units. In contrast, a one–unit increase in the use of wearable devices led to a decrease in the career expectation for salaried workers from 1 to 0.545, a decrease of 0.455 units. Furthermore, a one–unit increase in monthly home internet spending resulted in a 1.953 increase in the career expectation for salaried workers, while a one–unit increase in mobile internet spending resulted in a 1.584 increase in their career expectation.

Table 6 Omnibus Test of the Model's Performance Using Only Significant Independent Variables

		Chi–square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	546.270	12	.000
	Block	546.270	12	.000
	Model	546.270	12	.000

As depicted in Table 6, the chi–square value of 546.270 surpasses the critical value at a significance level of 0.05, considering the presence of 12 degrees of freedom. This observation signifies that the dependent variable is greatly influenced by all the independent variables within the model. In essence, these findings indicate that the combined influence of the independent variables carries substantive influence in determining the outcome of the dependent variable.

Table 7 The Model Summary Using Only Significant Independent Variables

Step	–2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	1065.910[a]	.359	.491

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

A statistical model (possibly regression) is presented in Table 7. The model has an R–squared value of 0.491, indicating that it explains approximately 49.1% of the variation in the dependent variable. Additionally, the significance value of 0.05 suggests that the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable are statistically significant at the 5% level.

Table 8 Classification Table for Back–Testing (Including Only Significant Independent Variables)

Observed			Predicted		
			Salary man		Percentage correct
			No	Yes	
Step 1	Salary man	No	316	131	70.7
		Yes	97	686	87.6
	Overall percentage				81.5

a. The cut value is .500

As indicated in Table 8, the classification results reveal that the model, incorporating all potential independent variables, demonstrates the capability to predict the key factors that influence an

individual's decision to choose a career as a salary man, achieving an accuracy rate of 81.5% for cases, using a cut–off value of 0.500 (or 50%).

Table 9 Coefficients of the Logistic Regression Model With All Independent Variables

Independent Variables		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	Gender (X1)	1.174	.180	42.621	1	.000	3.235
	Age (X2)	–1.187	.108	120.371	1	.000	.305
	Monthly income and other income sources (X3)	–.028	.063	.193	1	.661	.973
	Values and culture: Preservation of beautiful Thai traditions, morality, and integrity (V4)	–.448	.142	9.978	1	.002	.639
	Social media platform (X5)	–.438	.111	15.550	1	.000	.646
	Desktop computer (X6)	1.544	.229	45.296	1	.000	4.685
	Notebook (X7)	1.277	.245	27.202	1	.000	3.585
	Wearable device (X10)	–.578	.184	9.855	1	.002	.561
	Internet usage period (X11)	.332	.102	10.545	1	.001	1.394
	Average hours of use per day (X12)	–.370	.134	7.688	1	.006	.690
	Monthly home internet expenditure (X13)	.750	.132	32.125	1	.000	2.117
	Monthly mobile internet expenditure (X14)	.432	.126	11.752	1	.001	1.541
	Constant	–.094	.957	.010	1	.921	.910

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: X1, X2, X3, V4, X5, X6, X7, X10, X11, X13, X14

The predictive regression equation of Model 1 using the coefficients from Table 5 can be described by the following equation:

$$P = \frac{1}{1+e^{-z}} 1$$

where P is Expected Career Salary man, and Z = – 0.094 + 1.174 (X1) –1.187(X2) – 0.448(V4) – 0.438(X5) +1.544(X6) + 1.277(X7) – 0.578(X10) + 0.332(X11) – 0.370(X12) + 0.750(X13) + 0.432(X14).

The statistical significance of each independent variable is elucidated in Table 9. The findings reveal that, concerning the dependent variable which is an individual's expected career salary man,

gender, age, values and culture, social media platform, desktop computer, notebook, wearable device, internet usage period, average hours of use per day, monthly home internet expenditure and monthly mobile internet expenditure are identified as significant contributors. In particular, when gender was changed from female (coded as 0) to male (coded as 1), the expected career of salaried employees increased by 3.235. In other words, the study found that men were more likely than women to choose careers as salaried employees. Additionally, a one–unit increase in age decreased the career expectation for salaried employees from 1 to 0.305, representing a decrease of 0.695. Similarly, a one–unit increase in values and culture decreased the career expectation for salaried employees from 1 to 0.639, indicating a decrease of 0.361. A one–unit increase in social media platform use also decreased the career expectation for salaried employees from 1 to 0.646, representing a decrease of 0.354. Conversely, a one–unit increase in desktop computer use significantly increased the career expectation for salaried employees by 1.544 units. A one–unit increase in notebook use raised the career expectation for salaried employees by as much as 1.277 units. By contrast, a one–unit increase in the use of wearable devices led to a decrease in the career expectation for salaried workers from 1 to 0.561, a decrease of 0.439 units. A one–unit increase in average hours of use per day decreased the career expectation for salaried employees from 1 to 0.690, representing a decrease of 0.689. Furthermore, a one–unit increase in internet usage period resulted in a 1.394 increase in the career expectation for salaried workers, a one–unit increase in monthly home internet spending resulted in a 2.117 increase in the career expectation for salaried workers, while a one–unit increase in mobile internet spending resulted in a 1.541 increase in their career expectation.

Discussion

This study identifies several factors impacting post–graduation career expectations, including gender, age, family income, and technology usage. Angwaomaodoko (2023) investigated how gender influences academic achievement and career choices among Nigerian college students. The study found that female students were more inclined to pursue arts and management fields, while male students leaned towards engineering and technology. Despite these gender–based preferences, gender differences had little impact on overall academic performance. However, students' perceptions of their gender significantly shaped their career aspirations, suggesting that fostering an environment of career

freedom could encourage students to pursue less traditional career paths. In a similar vein, Şensoy (2023) observed that gender and location had minimal impact on shaping career expectations, but notable differences were found based on age. Specifically, students aged 26 and older – whether nearing graduation or already graduated – showed higher career expectations.

A study by Shumba and Naong (2013) in South Africa examined the role of family income in career choice. The study found that 69.2% of students cited insufficient family income as a key barrier to pursuing their desired careers. Technology usage also played a critical role in shaping career expectations. Siripipatthanakul et al. (2022), Alyoussef and Omer (2023), Klayklung et al. (2023), and Muthmainnah et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of digital connectivity and the growing trend of tech-savvy individuals in preparation for the job market. Additionally, Nair (2023) emphasised how classroom technology enhanced graduate school experiences, fostering greater motivation, critical thinking, and resource access. Exposure to technology in the classroom was linked to increased career readiness, giving graduates a competitive advantage in a rapidly changing job market. The study concludes that a multifaceted approach is required to support prospective students. Educators should integrate both traditional and digital learning tools to meet diverse career needs, and policymakers should develop strategies to address the challenges faced by different groups, thereby improving access to educational opportunities and enhancing overall career prospects.

Discussion

This study identifies several factors impacting post-graduation career expectations, including gender, age, family income, and technology usage. Angwaomaodoko (2023) investigated how gender influences academic achievement and career choices among Nigerian college students. The study found that female students were more inclined to pursue arts and management fields, while male students leaned toward engineering and technology. Despite these gender-based preferences, gender differences had little impact on overall academic performance. However, students' perceptions of their gender significantly shaped their career aspirations, suggesting that fostering an environment of career freedom could encourage students to pursue less traditional career paths. Similarly, Şensoy (2023) observed that gender and location had minimal impact on shaping career expectations, but significant

differences were found based on age. Specifically, students aged 26 and older—whether nearing graduation or already graduated—showed higher career expectations.

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Conclusion

This study advances existing career development theories by integrating demographic, economic, cultural, and technological factors within the digital age context. It highlights the complex, multifaceted nature of career expectations, emphasizing the interplay between individual characteristics (such as gender and age) and external influences like technology and socio-economic status. The findings suggest that models of career decision-making should incorporate digital engagement and cultural values to better understand individuals' aspirations, especially in developing countries undergoing technological transformation.

Empirically, the results provide concrete evidence that gender, age, economic capacity, and technology usage significantly influence career expectations among students in international programs. The observed gender disparity in preferences for international schools' points to potential cultural or perceptual biases, which policymakers and educational institutions should consider when designing career guidance and support programs. The positive correlation between economic factors and career

ambitions underscores the importance of financial accessibility in shaping career pathways. Additionally, the relationships identified between technology use and career expectations reinforce the need to incorporate digital literacy and access initiatives into career development strategies.

While the study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between variables. Second, the sample is restricted to Thai students in international programs, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other populations or regions. Third, self-reported data can be subject to bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of responses. Additionally, the study did not explore other relevant factors such as parental influence, educational quality, or psychological aspects, which might also impact career expectations.

Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to track changes in career expectations over time and establish causal relationships. Expanding the sample to include students from different countries or educational backgrounds can enhance generalizability. Researchers should also consider qualitative approaches to gain deeper insights into cultural and personal motivations influencing career choices. Exploring additional variables such as parental support, psychological factors, and access to resources could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of career expectations in the digital age. Moreover, investigating the impact of specific technology platforms or digital skills on career decision-making would be valuable.

This study highlights the multifaceted influences shaping career expectations among students in international programs within the digital age. By identifying key demographic, economic, cultural, and technological factors, it provides a foundation for policymakers, educators, and practitioners to develop targeted strategies that align career development initiatives with the evolving digital landscape. Recognizing these diverse influences is essential for fostering realistic and aspirational career paths suited for a rapidly changing global economy.

Research Benefit

The varied effects of technology on postgraduate career expectations, particularly the notable increases linked to computer, laptop, home internet, and mobile internet usage, underscore the significance of digital connectivity and technological skills in enhancing career aspirations. This trend

reflects a broader movement of tech–savvy individuals pursuing careers that resonate with their digital engagement patterns.

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