A Multidimensional Model of Career Choice among University Students in Shaanxi Province, China*



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Abstract

This study aims to (1) develop a multidimensional model of factors influencing career choice among public university students in Shaanxi Province. (2) to validate the measurement scales for the study variables using EFA and CFA. test the effects of the six predictors on career choice and assess the model's explained variance. (3) to test the effects of the six predictors on career choice and assess the model's explained variance. A quantitative survey design was employed. The research population comprised third- and fourth-year undergraduates from five public universities in Shaanxi Province. Measurement scales for seven latent constructs—teacher support, university career service support, attitude toward career choice, self-efficacy, motivation, peer support, and career choice outcomes—were developed and refined through expert review and a pilot test. Stratified random sampling yielded 400 valid responses. Data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS, including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha), exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression to examine measurement quality and test the proposed model.

The research result was found that: (1) The measurement model showed satisfactory psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.76, acceptable KMO values, clear factor structures, and excellent overall fit indices in CFA (e.g., CFI = 0.983; RMSEA = 0.018). (2) Descriptive results indicated moderately high levels of perceived institutional/peer support and internal psychological resources, while career choice outcomes were only moderately crystallized; a majority of students reported unclear career plans. (3) Regression analysis confirmed that all six predictors had significant positive effects on career choice, jointly explaining 49.4% of the variance (R^2 = 0.494). Teacher support and university career service support were the strongest determinants, followed by self-efficacy, motivation, peer support, and attitude.

Keywords: Career Choice Model; University Students; Teacher Support; Self-Efficacy; Shaanxi Province

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, globalization and the spread of digital technologies have changed how labour markets operate and what kinds of skills are in demand. For university students, the move from campus into full-time work is no longer a straightforward step but a period of uncertainty that requires more planning and adjustment than before. In this study, career choice is understood as the process through which individuals weigh their interests, values, abilities and real-world constraints when thinking about different kinds of work within a particular social and economic context (Spokane and Cruza-Guet, 2005). For undergraduates, the decisions made at this stage often have long-term consequences for the types of social roles they take on, their income prospects and their broader sense of life satisfaction.

In recent years, the employment environment for Chinese university graduates has become more challenging. The number of institutions and graduates continues to grow, while the economy's capacity to absorb new entrants into suitable positions has not kept pace. Slower post-pandemic growth, business closures and weakened demand have intensified competition for quality jobs and increased structural unemployment, including "high education, low match" employment and low perceived returns to higher education. These pressures tend to be more pronounced in the less developed western part of the country. Shaanxi Province, although a major higher education centre in Northwest China with numerous universities and vocational institutions, still records lower employment and entrepreneurship outcomes for graduates than many coastal provinces.

At the same time, shortcomings in career education and guidance mean that many students must navigate this turbulent labour market with incomplete information and uneven institutional support. Existing studies emphasise the role of psychological and contextual factors—such as attitudes, self-efficacy, motivation, teacher support, career services and peer influence—in career decision-making (Robertson, 2014), but most focus on developed countries or China's eastern cities. Against this background, the study focuses on university students in Shaanxi Province and builds a model of factors that shape their career choices. The model brings together students' internal psychological characteristics and the support they receive from teachers, universities and peers, with the aim of offering evidence that can inform career guidance practice and related policy.

Objectives of the Research

1. To develop a multidimensional model of factors influencing career choice among public university students in Shaanxi Province.

2. To validate the measurement scales for the study variables using EFA and CFA.

3. To test the effects of the six predictors on career choice and assess the model's explained variance.

Research Methodology

The 1st Step: Conceptual and Documentary Grounding

This study began with a documentary study to ground construct selection and operational definitions in established career decision theories and empirical models. Career decision-making was treated as a developmental process moving from exploration to commitment, in which confidence and information-related difficulties shape decisional status (Taylor and Betz, 1983; Gati et al., 2012). Social Cognitive Career Theory provided the core logic for linking self-efficacy and related beliefs to career goals and choices, while allowing contextual supports to be modeled as enabling conditions (Lent et al., 1994). Prior cross-cultural evidence supported using this structure with university populations, while acknowledging that the strength of contextual effects may vary by setting (Hui et al., 2013). Recent synthesis work further justified treating exploration and self-efficacy as closely connected outcomes in student samples and informed the inclusion of peer-related support (Kleine et al., 2021). In parallel, the Theory of Planned Behavior guided the inclusion of attitude and control-related constructs as predictors of intention-linked career behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Evidence from employment and intention studies supported using attitudinal and control pathways in career-related decision contexts (Ghose, 2005; Su et al., 2021), and the frequent empirical alignment between perceived behavioral control and self-efficacy justified treating self-efficacy as a central capability belief in the integrated model (Hassan and Bakri, 2016). Finally, studies on social and institutional supports motivated the inclusion of teacher support, university career services, and peer support as contextual determinants that can strengthen motivation, confidence, and career-related engagement (Hamre and Pianta, 2001; Chan, 2018).

The 2nd Step: Research Design and Population

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was adopted to develop and test a multidimensional model of career choice among university students in Shaanxi Province, China. The research population consisted of third- and fourth-year undergraduates in public universities, selected because they are close to graduation and therefore actively confronting career decision-making tasks and constraints.

The 3rd Step: Variables, Measures, and Instrument Development

Based on the documentary grounding above, seven latent constructs were specified: teacher support, university career service support, attitude toward career choice, self-efficacy, motivation, peer support, and career choice outcomes. Each construct was operationalized using multi-item Likert-type scales that capture students' perceived supports, psychological resources, and decision status. The scale pool and item wording were refined to align with prior theory: self-efficacy items reflected confidence in performing career-related tasks, attitude items reflected evaluative orientation toward career choice behavior, and support measures reflected interpersonal and institutional resources that shape motivation and

capability beliefs. Peer-related items were retained to reflect evidence that peers contribute to exploration and decision confidence in university samples.

The 4th Step: Validity Checks and Pilot Procedures

To strengthen content validity, five experts (associate professor level or above) from universities and industry evaluated item relevance using the Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC). Items were revised for clarity and alignment with the intended constructs, ensuring that the instrument reflected both SCT/TPB logic and the specific support context of universities. A pilot test with 70 students was then conducted to assess item clarity, completion time, and preliminary reliability, and final wording adjustments were made before the main survey.

The 5th Step: Sampling and Data Collection

A stratified random sampling strategy was used. First, three representative cities in Shaanxi Province were selected. Second, five public universities of different types within these cities were chosen. Third, classes within the target academic years were randomly sampled until quotas were met. Data were collected online via the Wenjuanxing platform. A total of 430 questionnaires were returned; after screening for completeness and response quality, 400 valid responses were retained for analysis.

The 6th Step: Data Analysis Strategy

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS. Descriptive statistics were used to profile respondents and summarize construct levels. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and exploratory factor analysis tested factorability using KMO and Bartlett's test. Confirmatory factor analysis evaluated the measurement model using standard fit indices. Pearson correlation analysis examined bivariate associations among constructs. Finally, multiple regression tested the proposed model by estimating the unique effects of teacher support, university career service support, attitude, self-efficacy, motivation, and peer support on career choice outcomes.

Research Results

The 1st objective is to develop a multidimensional model of factors influencing career choice among public university students in Shaanxi Province. From the research result, it was found that:

A total of 430 questionnaires were distributed to students from five public universities in Shaanxi Province. After screening for completeness and response quality, 400 valid responses were retained, yielding an effective response rate of 93%. Table 1 summarises the main demographic characteristics of the students who completed the survey.

Overall, female students made up a modest majority of the sample (55.75%), while male students accounted for 44.25%. Fourth-year students accounted for 55.0% of the sample, while third-year students comprised 45.0%, consistent with the focus on students

approaching graduation. In terms of academic majors, 33.50% were enrolled in engineering, 28.00% in humanities, and 25.25% in economics/management, with the remainder drawn from other disciplines.

With respect to place of origin, 40.75% of respondents were from the provincial capital, 34.00% from prefecture-level cities, and the rest from smaller counties and towns. Only 39.75% reported having a clear career plan, whereas 60.25% indicated that their plans were still vague or unsettled. In other words, even at the later stages of their degree, many students remain in an exploratory or undecided phase, highlighting the need to understand which factors can help them move toward more informed and realistic career choices.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	177	44.25
	Female	223	55.75
Year	Third	180	45.00
	Fourth	220	55.00
Major	Engineering	134	33.50
	Humanities	112	28.00
	Economics/Management	101	25.25
Residence	Provincial Capital	163	40.75
	Prefecture City	136	34.00
	County/Town	61	15.25
Career Planning	Yes	159	39.75
	No	241	60.25

Descriptive statistics for the seven latent constructs are reported in Table 2. All variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Mean values for the six predictors—teacher support, university career service support, attitude, self-efficacy, motivation and peer support—fell between 3.65 and 3.72, indicating moderately high levels of perceived support and internal resources. The mean for career choice was 3.61 (SD = 0.99), suggesting that students, on average, reported a moderately positive but not yet fully crystallised career decision status.

For all independent variables, the standard deviations were below 0.71, suggesting that students' ratings did not fluctuate widely and were clustered fairly closely around the mean. Taken together, the descriptive profile points to a configuration of relatively strong perceived support and moderate internal motivation, alongside only partially clarified career choices.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of constructs

Construct	Mean (M)	SD	Min	Max
Teacher Support	3.721	0.657	1.75	5.00
University Career Service Support	3.706	0.688	1.60	5.00
Attitude	3.653	0.695	1.40	5.00
Self-Efficacy	3.671	0.703	1.60	5.00
Motivation	3.688	0.693	1.75	5.00
Peer Support	3.662	0.702	1.60	5.00
Career Choice (DV)	3.614	0.989	1.00	5.00

The 2nd objective is to validate the measurement scales for the study variables using EFA and CFA. From the research results, it was found that:

Internal consistency reliability was first assessed using Cronbach's alpha and corrected item–total correlations (CITC). As shown in Table 3, all constructs achieved alpha coefficients above 0.76, ranging from 0.763 (Teacher Support) to 0.884 (Career Choice). All corrected item–total correlations exceeded 0.55, and deleting any single item failed to raise the Cronbach's alpha for its dimension. Taken together, this pattern points to solid internal consistency and supports the continued use of these scales in subsequent analyses.

Table 3: Reliability statistics

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's α	CITC range
Teacher Support	12	0.763	0.56–0.72
University Career Service Support	12	0.812	0.60–0.78
Attitude	6	0.805	0.58–0.70
Self-Efficacy	9	0.841	0.63–0.76
Motivation	8	0.856	0.59–0.79
Peer Support	7	0.802	0.57–0.75
Career Choice	8	0.884	0.64–0.81

Construct validity was examined using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). For EFA, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) values ranged from 0.773 to 0.882, and Bartlett's tests of sphericity were all significant at $p < 0.001$ (Table 4), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. The number of factors extracted for each construct matched the theoretical design, and the cumulative variance explained exceeded 65% in all cases. In addition, Harman's single-factor test showed that the first factor accounted for only 27.9% of the total variance, suggesting that common method bias is not a major concern.

Table 4: EFA and common method bias results

Construct	KMO	Bartlett's Test (p)	Factors extracted	Cumulative variance (%)
Teacher Support	0.797	< 0.001	4	67.2
University Career Service Support	0.816	< 0.001	4	66.8
Attitude	0.773	< 0.001	2	68.3
Self-Efficacy	0.805	< 0.001	3	69.5
Motivation	0.822	< 0.001	2	70.1
Peer Support	0.787	< 0.001	3	65.4
Career Choice	0.882	< 0.001	3	72.5

A CFA of the full measurement model was conducted using AMOS 26.0. The fit indices indicated an excellent model fit (Table 5): CMIN/DF = 1.128, IFI = 0.983, TLI = 0.980, CFI = 0.983, GFI = 0.881 and RMSEA = 0.018. All values met or exceeded conventional cut-off criteria (CMIN/DF < 3.0, IFI/TLI/CFI > 0.90, GFI > 0.85, RMSEA < 0.08), demonstrating that the hypothesised factor structure adequately captured the relationships among observed items.

Table 5: Model fit indices for CFA

Index	Value	Threshold	Evaluation
CMIN/DF	1.128	< 3.00	Excellent
IFI	0.983	> 0.90	Excellent
TLI	0.980	> 0.90	Excellent
CFI	0.983	> 0.90	Excellent
GFI	0.881	> 0.85	Acceptable
RMSEA	0.018	< 0.08	Excellent

Convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR) and standardised factor loadings. As Table 6 shows, AVE values for all constructs were above 0.50, and CR values exceeded 0.80, indicating that each set of indicators shared sufficient common variance. Standardised factor loadings ranged from 0.68 to 0.88 and were all statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Overall, the combination of AVE, composite reliability and factor loadings offers clear support for the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 6: Convergent validity results

Construct	AVE	CR	Factor loading range
Teacher Support	0.601	0.836	0.70–0.86
University Career Service Support	0.618	0.829	0.71–0.85
Attitude	0.584	0.812	0.68–0.81
Self-Efficacy	0.626	0.844	0.72–0.87
Motivation	0.635	0.850	0.73–0.88
Peer Support	0.605	0.821	0.69–0.84
Career Choice	0.608	0.886	0.71–0.88

Overall, the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability, clear factor structures and strong convergent validity, providing a solid basis for examining the structural relationships among the constructs in the proposed career choice model.

The 3rd objective is to test the effects of the six predictors on career choice and assess the model's explained variance. From the research results, it was found that:

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships among the seven constructs. As shown in Table 7, all independent variables were significantly and positively correlated with career choice at the 0.01 level. The correlations with career choice ranged from 0.536 for Attitude to 0.596 for University Career Service Support, which can be interpreted as moderate associations in size.

Teacher support (r = 0.545), self-efficacy (r = 0.564), motivation (r = 0.552) and peer support (r = 0.537) were also moderately correlated with career choice. In addition, the predictors were intercorrelated (r = 0.47–0.59), which is expected given that they all represent aspects of students' support environment and psychological resources. However, the correlations were not so high as to suggest redundancy among constructs.

Table 7: Correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Teacher Support	1						
University Career Service Support	0.521**	1					
Attitude	0.472**	0.496**	1				
Self-Efficacy	0.533**	0.514**	0.562**	1			
Motivation	0.538**	0.523**	0.501**	0.589**	1		
Peer Support	0.482**	0.475**	0.468**	0.527**	0.549**	1	
Career Choice	0.545**	0.596**	0.536**	0.564**	0.552**	0.537**	1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$.

To test the proposed career choice model, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed with career choice as the dependent variable and the six constructs as predictors. The regression model reached statistical significance ($F = 63.840$, $p < 0.001$). Together, the six predictors accounted for 49.4% of the variance in career choice ($R^2 = 0.494$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.486$), which is a relatively high level of explained variance for a behavioural outcome in an educational context.

As shown in Table 8, all six predictors had significant positive effects on career choice ($p < 0.05$). Looking at the standardised coefficients, teacher support ($\beta = 0.176$, $p = 0.001$) and university career service support ($\beta = 0.175$, $p = 0.001$) emerged as the two strongest predictors, pointing to the importance of both classroom-level and institutional support. Self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.141$, $p = 0.010$) and motivation ($\beta = 0.131$, $p = 0.016$) also showed significant positive effects, indicating that students' confidence in their abilities and the value they attach to future work play a meaningful role in shaping their career choices. Peer support ($\beta = 0.128$, $p = 0.013$) and attitude ($\beta = 0.105$, $p = 0.036$) had somewhat smaller but still meaningful effects, suggesting that peers and evaluative orientations towards career behaviour add further variance beyond formal supports.

Variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all predictors were below 2.31, well within acceptable limits and indicating no serious multicollinearity problem.

Table 8: Multiple regression analysis predicting career choice

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.	VIF
Teacher Support	0.265	0.078	0.176	3.385	0.001	2.098
University Career Service Support	0.252	0.078	0.175	3.220	0.001	2.298
Attitude	0.126	0.060	0.105	2.106	0.036	1.932
Self-Efficacy	0.182	0.070	0.141	2.589	0.010	2.307
Motivation	0.147	0.061	0.131	2.414	0.016	2.279
Peer Support	0.167	0.067	0.128	2.484	0.013	2.077

In summary, the validated model shows that external supports (teacher and university career services) and internal psychological factors (self-efficacy, motivation, attitude and peer support) jointly and significantly shape university students' career choices. The model explains nearly half of the variance in career choice, providing a robust empirical framework for understanding and improving career guidance and support systems in public universities in Shaanxi Province.

The New Body of Knowledge

The new body of knowledge presented in this study is a validated multidimensional career choice model that integrates institutional supports and psychological resources into a single explanatory framework. By synthesizing Social Cognitive Career Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior with empirical evidence from Shaanxi Province, the model clarifies how teacher support and university career services function as core structural conditions, while self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and peer support operate as internal and social mechanisms shaping career decisions. The model offers a practical guideline for universities to design coordinated teaching, guidance, and peer-based interventions, thereby improving students' career clarity, employability, and transition from study to work.

Table 9: Synthesis of the New Body of Knowledge

Dimension	Key Elements	Role in the Model	Practical Implication
Institutional Support	Teacher support; Career service support	Core external drivers	Embed career guidance in teaching and services
Psychological Resources	Self-efficacy; Motivation; Attitude	Internal decision mechanisms	Build confidence and career readiness
Social Support	Peer support	Social reinforcement	Use peer sharing and mentoring
Outcome	Career choice clarity	Decision result	Reduce uncertainty and mismatch

Discussion of Research Results

From the research result of the 1st objective, it was found that the multidimensional career choice model was empirically supported, and that teacher support and university career service support played the most influential roles in shaping students' career choice outcomes. This is because career decision-making among university students is strongly conditioned by environmental supports that provide information, guidance, and confidence for the transition from study to work, which is consistent with the concept, theory, and research work of Social Cognitive Career Theory emphasizing the joint influence of contextual supports and individual beliefs (Lent et al., 1994).

From the research result of the 2nd objective, it was found that the measurement scales for all latent variables demonstrated satisfactory reliability, clear factor structures, and strong construct validity. This is because the scales were developed on the basis of well-established career decision constructs and task-specific self-efficacy concepts, which have been shown to produce stable and interpretable measurement structures across student

populations, consistent with the concept, theory, and research work of career decision-making self-efficacy (Taylor and Betz, 1983).

From the research result of the 3rd objective, it was found that all six predictors were significantly related to career choice, while many students still reported unclear career plans despite moderate levels of perceived support and psychological resources. This is because career intentions and decisions are often constrained by uncertainty and structural labor market conditions, especially in less developed regions, which is consistent with the concept, theory, and research work on job-search intention and behavior under employment pressure (Ghose, 2005).

This study developed and tested a multidimensional model of career choice among public university students in Shaanxi Province, China. Using survey data from 400 third- and fourth-year undergraduates, the study confirmed that career choice is shaped by a combination of institutional supports and psychological resources rather than by any single factor. The validated results showed that teacher support and university career service support were the strongest influences on students' career choice outcomes, while self-efficacy, motivation, peer support, and attitude also contributed significant positive effects. The model explained nearly half of the variance in career choice, indicating strong explanatory power for an educational and behavioral outcome. Overall, the findings suggest that improving students' career decision quality requires coordinated action within universities, including integrating career development into teaching, strengthening the reach and effectiveness of career services, and designing practical activities that build students' confidence, motivation, and peer-based support so that career choices become clearer and more actionable as graduation approaches.

Suggestions

From the results of the research, the researcher has the following suggestions:

1. The suggestions from the research

From the 1st objective, it was found that teacher support and university career service support were the strongest factors influencing career choice among university students. Therefore, the related institutes, particularly public universities and higher education administrators, should apply integrated career development strategies by embedding career guidance into regular teaching, strengthening cooperation between academic departments and career service centers, and ensuring that career support is provided continuously throughout students' study period rather than only before graduation.

From the 2nd objective, it was found that the measurement scales used in this study demonstrated good reliability and validity and can effectively capture students' perceived supports and psychological resources related to career choice. Therefore, the related institutes, such as university career centers and educational quality assurance units, should

apply these validated instruments as diagnostic tools to assess students' career readiness, identify gaps in support provision, and monitor the effectiveness of career education and guidance programs.

From the 3rd objective, it was found that self-efficacy, motivation, attitude, and peer support significantly influenced career choice, while many students still lacked clear career plans. Therefore, the related institutes should apply targeted interventions that focus on building students' confidence and motivation, such as structured career exploration activities, supervised internships with feedback, peer mentoring programs, and small-group career discussions that help students translate vague intentions into concrete career decisions.

2. The suggestions for future research

2.1 Employing longitudinal research designs to examine how changes in institutional support and psychological factors influence career choice and employment outcomes over time.

2.2 Applying the proposed model to different educational contexts, such as private universities, higher vocational colleges, or other regions and countries, to test its generalisability and contextual sensitivity.

2.3 Using advanced analytical approaches, such as structural equation modelling or mixed-method designs, to explore mediating and moderating mechanisms among support variables, psychological resources, and career choice outcomes.

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