

## **A STUDY ON STUDENTS' PERCEIVED CAREER DECISION-MAKING SELF-EFFICACY AT S COLLEGE IN YUNNAN PROVINCE, CHINA**

**Yao Zhao** <sup>1\*</sup>

**Yanan Yang** <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Master Candidate in Educational Administration, Stamford International University of Thailand

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer, Stamford International University, Thailand, xiaoyarain@hotmail.com

\* Corresponding Author, E-mail: 1761066268@qq.com

**Abstract:** This study aimed to understand the differences in students' perceived career decision-making self-efficacy at S College in Yunnan Province, China, under different demographic backgrounds. A quantitative study was conducted by distributing survey questionnaires through convenient sampling. Data analysis was conducted on 364 valid questionnaires collected. Through the descriptive statistical analysis, independent sample T-test, and one-way ANOVA analysis, the survey concluded that the career decision-making self-efficacy of students in S College was moderate. Overall, there was no significant difference in the students' perceived career decision-making self-efficacy in grade, birthplace, whether they have part-time experience or not, and whether only child or not. Still, there was a significant difference in gender. From the five scale dimensions, there were significant differences in each dimension in the above aspects. Based on the research results, it was proposed to focus on the female population, graduate population, and rural students, and actively encourage students to participate in practical training on and off-campus to find employment successfully.

**Keywords:** Career Decision-making Self-efficacy, S College, College Students

### **Introduction**

The world economy and society were in a period of rapid and ever-changing development and adjustment. With the continuous development of society and the increasing enrollment of higher education institutions, more and more graduates flocked to the market and society. The problem of difficult employment for college graduates has attracted widespread attention from all sectors of society and in-depth research by more and more scholars. In the fierce employment competition and career mobility process, it was particularly important for college students to make the most effective career decisions based on the current employment situation and needs combined with the situation. Career decision-making self-efficacy was a key factor for college students to cope with difficulties in the career decision-making process. Relevant studies had conducted specialized surveys, and the results showed

that the level of career decision-making self-efficacy not only directly affected an individual's confidence in making successful career decisions but also increased the difficulty of career selection, leading to a series of mental health problems (Chen, 2011).

American psychologists Hackett & Betz first proposed the concept of career decision-making self-efficacy (Yang et al., 2019). Subsequently, Taylor & Betz developed the Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE) to measure an individual's level of confidence in successfully making career decisions (Hackett & Betz, 1983). Some scholars have conducted extensive research on factors such as gender, age, birthplace, education level, years of work, family situation, parents' income, and level of education.

Afterwards, research on career decision-making self-efficacy also spread to China. Chinese scholars Peng & Long introduced the career decision-making self-efficacy questionnaire developed by Hackett and Betz in China. They revised it according to the actual situation of Chinese university students, becoming the most widely used scale with good validity and reliability (Liu, 2010). From the relevant research on career decision-making self-efficacy in China, the main method was the questionnaire survey method as a research tool, and the research scope mainly focused on the career decision-making of college students. The target audience was mainly undergraduate and master's graduates. In recent years, there have been new advances in research on career decision-making self-efficacy. Researchers had further expanded the scope of research on career decision-making self-efficacy, focusing on the group of college graduates and studying career decision-making self-efficacy.

Higher vocational education played an important role in China, providing a continuous source of talent support for economic development and playing an important role in the process of national economic restructuring and industrial upgrading (Ye, 2012). According to the latest data released by the Chinese Ministry of Education, as of June 2023, the total number of higher education institutions in China had reached 3072, including a total of 2820 ordinary higher education institutions, including 1275 undergraduate colleges and 1545 vocational colleges (Wang et al., 2022). However, with the popularization of higher vocational education, the number of graduates has rapidly increased. The structural unemployment dilemma of "some people have no job, but there was no job" has become the main problem faced by current vocational college graduates. They were at a disadvantage in fierce employment competition and had encountered difficulties in career decision-making, which had affected normal employment work (Wang, 2016). During the process of career selection, many job-seeking intentions of vocational college students may have been limited due to educational qualifications, resulting in a certain gap in employment rate, job situation, work environment, and salary compared to undergraduate and graduate students (Cui, 2023).

Yunnan Province, China was in a transportation hub with natural geographical advantages, adjacent to numerous neighboring countries and cities. Against this backdrop, higher vocational

education has ushered in new opportunities for domestic and international cooperation in education. In research related to career decision-making, Wang (2018) surveyed 100 impoverished undergraduate students at Dianchi College, Yunnan University. The survey results showed that the overall score and scores of self-efficacies in various dimensions were not high, and it was necessary to improve the self-efficacy of students in career decision-making. There were currently no case studies available for reference and inspiration on the self-efficacy of vocational decision-making among college students. Yunnan S College has a 68-year history of education and has delivered more than 40,000 outstanding skilled talents to society. It was also one of the most distinctive universities in the field of higher vocational education in Yunnan Province. Empirical research was conducted on the current situation and differences in career decision-making self-efficacy among students of Yunnan S College, providing some ideas for improving the career decision-making self-efficacy of vocational college graduates and smoothly making career decisions.

### **Research Objectives**

- 1) To identify the demographic backgrounds of students at S College in Yunnan Province (gender, grade, association type, and association position)
- 2) To determine the overall level of student's perceived career decision-making self-efficacy.
- 3) To analyze the differences in the students' perceived career decision-making self-efficacy with different demographic backgrounds

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Research on the Definition of Career Decision-making Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy was first proposed by Bandura, which referred to a person's belief in the ability to complete a given task or behavior (Yan, 2019). Betz & Hackett were the first to apply self-efficacy related theories to career behavior, using self-efficacy theory to study career decision-making difficulties in the field of career. The initial research used a self-efficacy scale to investigate gender differences in career choices among college students. The study found that low self-efficacy among female college students in non-traditional female-dominated career fields led to fewer job openings in these fields. A career decision-making self-efficacy scale was designed to extend the self-efficacy theory to the career field, thus giving rise to the concept of career decision-making self-efficacy (Wan & Song, 2022). Career decision-making self-efficacy referred to the self-evaluation or confidence level of decision-makers in their ability to complete various tasks during the career decision-making process (Chen & Geng, 2013). After multiple empirical studies, career decision-making self-efficacy ultimately included the following five dimensions: self-evaluation ability, including understanding one's abilities, career interests, career-related needs and values, and self-awareness. The ability to collect occupational-

related information, including the collection and organization of occupational information. Ability to choose goals and match personal characteristics with job requirements. Career planning ability, including implementation steps and adjustments after career decision-making; The ability to solve or cope with problems or obstacles encountered in the career decision-making process (Yan, 2011). Subsequently, two scholars, Hackett & Betz developed the Career Decision-making Self-efficacy Scale (CDMSE) based on five dimensions of discussion. This scale was used to measure an individual's confidence in the ability to complete career decisions successfully. Subsequently, this theory and scale were applied by many researchers to more research fields, achieving important academic and practical value.

### ***Research on the Measurement of Career Decision-making Self-efficacy***

Taylor & Betz (1983) developed the Career Decision-making Self-efficacy Scale with the aim of evaluating self-efficacy expectations for career decision tasks by respondents indicating their ability to complete each task successfully. The higher the score, the more confident the individual was in making decisions and the more mature the attitude towards professional decisions. On the contrary, the lower the score, the less confident the individual was to make decisions. This questionnaire was standardized, and a testing manual was released in 1993.

Betz & Taylor developed a simple formula for career decision-making self-efficacy, which could be easily used for counseling and evaluation, as well as for pre- and post-intervention evaluation. The formula only had 25 questions, and the results showed that its effectiveness was not inferior to the original version of the test. Repeated trials by researchers showed support for the use of this version in research and application environments (Hackett & Betz, 1996). Since then, many scholars have continued to explore and compile new scales to achieve a more accurate measurement, trying to expand the usefulness of self-efficacy theory in promoting career development and broadening career choices and focusing on developing and evaluating interventions aimed at improving career decision-making self-efficacy.

Chinese scholars Peng & Long (2001) developed the College Student Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy Scale based on Betz & Taylor's Career Decision-making Self-efficacy Scale. Peng & Long (2003) further explored the professional decision-making self-efficacy of high school students based on previous research. Li & Ma (2003) conducted a survey on the career decision-making self-efficacy of graduates, including undergraduate and graduate students, using the Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy Scale and further examined the relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and self-evaluation. Zhao referred to the Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy Scale - Simplified (CDMSE-SF) developed by Taylor & Betz, and conducted case analysis, interview surveys, and open-ended questionnaire surveys on college graduates to develop the Simplified Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy Scale for Chinese college students.

Afterward, Chinese researchers conducted many investigations and studies, the one hand, further expanding the research scope of career decision-making self-efficacy, and on the other hand, reevaluating the reliability, validity, and applicability of the career decision-making self-efficacy scale and developing a scale that was more suitable for Chinese survey subjects.

### ***Research on Career Decision-making Self-efficacy under Different Demographic Backgrounds***

Demographic backgrounds affected career decision-making self-efficacy. The demographic backgrounds included gender, age, grade, birthplace, education level, and whether only child or not. Different scholars had different research conclusions.

Taylor & Betz (1983), Chung (2002), and Lam & Santos (2018) unanimously concluded that there was no significant correlation between career decision-making self-efficacy and individual gender in research on gender as a variable. Li (2019) found significant gender differences in career decision-making self-efficacy, with males were higher information collection and self-evaluation abilities than females. Yang conducted a cross-analysis of career decision-making self-efficacy among students of different genders, Male students scored slightly higher than female students in all aspects, and it was also found that there were significant differences in career decision-making self-efficacy among students of different grades. However, some researchers came to the opposite conclusion: there was no significant gender difference in career decision-making self-efficacy (Liu & Liang, 2014).

Professor Peng conducted a study on the variable of whether one was an only child or not. In 2001, the researcher selected college students as the research object. The researcher concluded that there was no significant correlation between the total score of career decision-making self-efficacy between only and non-only child. Zhang et al. found that being an only child did not affect the level of career decision-making self-efficacy among students (Zhang & Shi, 2014). Li & Hu (2020) surveyed 144 deaf college students at Leshan Normal University through a questionnaire. The dimensions of career decision-making self-efficacy among only child students were higher than those of non-only child students. However, the differences in career decision-making self-efficacy among students in terms of whether only child or not reached a significant level. However, many scholars also believed that non-only children had higher career decision-making self-efficacy when problem-solving than only child.

Regarding grades, Peterson's research showed that there was a significant correlation between individual age, grade, and career decision-making self-efficacy. The older an individual was the higher their grade, the higher their self-efficacy (Yan, 2011). On the contrary, Luzzo believed that there was no correlation between age and career decision-making self-efficacy (Luzzo, 1994). Chinese researchers also found that as the grade level increased, the career decision-making self-efficacy among college students showed a U-shaped pattern of "high low high", with lower self-efficacy in the sophomore and junior years and relatively higher self-efficacy in the freshmen and senior grades.

***Research on the Development of Career Decision-making Self-efficacy in Education***

Self-efficacy was crucial for an individual's career and professional choices, as it played a crucial role in choosing a work environment (Bandura, 1997). Research found that students who completed vocational courses generally exhibited stronger career decision-making self-efficacy, especially in obtaining career information, setting career goals, and career planning. Vocational courses also seemed to reduce people's perceived difficulties in career decision-making (Robert, 2006).

As borderless careers became mainstream, individuals needed to improve decision-making self-efficacy in career transitions to ensure better career outcomes and sustainable career development, especially when transitioning from school to the work environment. Based on the survey results of 235 college students, Lu et al. showed that people with an active personality were more likely to perform well in the success criteria of careers and then had more confidence in making career decisions. They also proposed that vocational educators in higher education could promote positive thinking training programs and provide success models to motivate and encourage family participation, especially for students with lower family economic status, to help improve students' career decision-making self-efficacy (Lu & Tang, 2019).

The research found that the influence on student career decision-making self-efficacy could be adjusted through intervention, and different intervention methods and procedures had inconsistent effects and effects. There were various forms of research on self-efficacy intervention in career decision-making, including group training, curriculum education, individual counseling, etc. Diegelman and Subich found in the study of college students that intervening in expectations of obtaining relevant professional degrees could enhance individual interest and motivation in the relevant field. The results indicated that expected interventions could enhance individual professional self-efficacy, and the improvement of professional self-efficacy further enhanced the level of professional self-efficacy (Diegelman & Subich, 2007).

**Methodology**

This study focused on the current career decision-making self-efficacy among students from S College in Yunnan Province. As of September 30, 2023, S College had a total of 10,170 freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. According to the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) scale requirements, 370 sample students needed to be selected to participate in this questionnaire activity through convenient sampling.

The survey questionnaire for this study, the Scale of Career Decision-making Self-efficacy for College Students was developed by Betz & Taylor (1983). It was not until 2001 that China introduced this scale. At that time, Professor Peng & Long collaborated on a study based on the CDMSE scale. Using interviews and questionnaire surveys, 1000 graduates from 14 universities in Wuhan were selected as the research subjects. Through actual data, the CDMSE scale was meticulously revised and

ultimately developed into the "College Student Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy Scale", which had good applicability to the Chinese college student population.

## Results

### *Demographic Analysis of Questionnaire Participants*

Among the students who participated in the questionnaire, 282 were male, accounting for 77.5%, while 82 were female, accounting for 22.5%. In terms of grades, the proportion of students in different grades also varied. There were 108 freshmen, 146 sophomores, and 92 juniors, accounting for 29.7%, 45.0%, and 25.3% respectively. From the perspective of birthplaces, there were 316 students from rural areas and 48 students from urban areas. The birthplaces of S College were mainly concentrated in rural areas. In the survey on whether students had part-time experience or not, the situation was relatively concentrated, and the proportion was relatively average. There were 165 students with part-time experience, accounting for 45.3%, while 199 students, accounting for 54.7%, had no relevant part-time work experience, making them a relatively average group in this study. From the perspective of whether students were the only child or not, among the surveyed students, there were 56 only child and 308 non-only children, accounting for 15.4% and 84.6%, respectively, indicating a high proportion of non-only child and a low proportion of only child families.

**Table 1:** Demographic Backgrounds Analysis for Samples (N=364)

Demographic backgrounds	Group	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male (1)	282	77.5
	Female (2)	82	22.5
Whether only child or not	Only child (1)	56	15.4
	Non-only child (2)	308	84.6
Birthplace	Rural (1)	316	86.8
	Urban (2)	48	13.2
Whether you have part-time experience or not	Part-time experience (1)	165	45.3
	No part-time experience(2)	199	54.7
Grade	Freshman (1)	108	29.7
	Sophomore (2)	146	45.0
	Junior (3)	92	25.3

### *Analysis of Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy Among College Students*

It was observed that the average level of the career decision-making self-efficacy scale for students at S College in Yunnan Province ( $M=2.77$ ,  $SD=0.866$ ) fell between 2.51 and 3.50 for other dimensions, indicating scores ranging from "a little bit of confidence" to "some confidence". It suggested that the overall level of career decision-making self-efficacy among students at S College was at a moderate level.

From the perspective of each sub-dimension of the project, self-evaluation ( $M=2.73$ ,

SD=0.926), information collection (M=2.72, SD=0.947), target selection (M=2.76, SD=0.916), formulating planning (M=2.80, SD=0.908), and problem solving (M=2.81, SD=0.902) they had the lowest scores, with "target selection" in the middle, and "formulating planning" and "problem solving" showing higher and more average scores. It indicated that students from S College had relatively low evaluations of abilities, and the channels for information collection were not smooth. Therefore, in the process of career decision-making, they might not have had enough confidence and assurance in making the right goal choices. However, they showed high confidence in formulating planning and problem-solving, demonstrating strong confidence in problem-solving in practical career decision-making. From the SD of various dimensions of the scale, it could be seen that the individual differences in career decision-making self-efficacy among students at S College were not significant.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics of Career Decision-making Self-efficacy (N=364)

Dimension	M	SD	Interpretation
Overall career decision-making self-efficacy	2.77	0.866	Moderate
Self-evaluation	2.73	0.926	Moderate
Information collection	2.72	0.947	Moderate
Target selection	2.76	0.916	Moderate
Formulating planning	2.80	0.908	Moderate
Problem solving	2.81	0.902	Moderate

*Differences Analysis on the Levels of career decision-making self-efficacy Compared with Demographic Factors*

**Table 3:** Research Hypothesis Test Results

Research hypotheses		Results
<b>H1</b>	There are significant differences in student's students perceived career decision-making self-efficacy under different demographic backgrounds.	Invalid
H1.1	There is a significant difference in student's perceived career decision-making self-efficacy of different genders.	Valid
H1.2	There is a significant difference in student's perceived career decision-making self-efficacy of different grades.	Invalid
H1.3	There is a significant difference in student's perceived career decision-making self-efficacy of different birthplaces.	Invalid
H1.4	There is a significant difference in student's perceived career decision-making self-efficacy with different part-time experiences.	Invalid
H1.5	There is a significant difference in student's perceived career decision-making self-efficacy whether only child or not.	Invalid

This study collected 364 valid questionnaires and used SPSS software to determine the



differences in career decision-making self-efficacy among students of different genders, grades, birthplace, whether they have part-time experience or not, and whether only child or not. There was no significant difference in the students' perceived career decision-making self-efficacy in grade, birthplace, whether they have part-time experience or not, and whether only child or not. There was a significant difference in gender. From the five scale dimensions, there were significant differences in each dimension in the above aspects.

## **Discussion**

The survey results of this study indicated that the overall career decision-making self-efficacy of S College students was at a moderate level. Among the five dimensions, self-evaluation and information collection had the lowest average score, while the dimension of planning and problem solving had a higher score.

Firstly, there were significant differences in career decision-making self-efficacy among students of different genders. It indicated that there was a difference in the development level of career decision-making self-efficacy between male and female students in college, and male students were significantly more capable than female students in various aspects due to the influence of gender factors. In addition, studies have shown that gender differences could affect decision-making efficacy in different occupational fields. Female college students had significantly lower self-efficacy in male-dominated or gender-neutral occupations than male college students as reported Wang (2014). In comparison, self-efficacy in female-dominated occupations was higher than that of male college students. However, there was not much difference in self-efficacy among male college students in various occupational fields (Li, 2023).

Secondly, there was no significant difference in career decision-making self-efficacy among students of different grades overall. The grade development trend of career decision-making self-efficacy among students in S College was that the scores were the lowest in freshman year, the highest in junior year, and tended to be higher than sophomore year. Based on the means of students from different grades on various dimensions and the entire scale, there was a U-shaped change in self-evaluation and information collection dimensions, with higher scores in freshmen and juniors and lower scores in sophomores. Based on the above results, it could be seen that there were significant differences in various dimensions of career decision-making self-efficacy among students of different grades, and the situation varied among students from different schools.

Thirdly, there was no significant difference in the overall career decision-making self-efficacy among students from different birthplaces. Shao (2019) found that urban students generally had higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy than rural students in all dimensions. Li & Sun (2013) found in a survey of student differences that urban students were slightly higher than rural students in

terms of "planning". Yang & Zhang (2015) found that students living in urban areas had higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy compared to rural and township students. The average of the five dimensions of career decision-making self-efficacy among students living in rural areas was the lowest. Zhang (2011) found that female students from different backgrounds had a particularly significant self-evaluation, with urban students generally having higher career decision-making self-efficacy than rural students. Meng (2014) found that students from urban areas scored significantly higher than those from rural areas in terms of self-evaluation and information collection. It could be seen that the survey results of this study shared similarities with previous researchers and had opposite conclusions.

Fourthly, there was no significant difference in overall career decision-making self-efficacy among students with different part-time experiences. Zhao (2005), Zhang (2007), and Yan (2011) all studied the relationship between work experience and career decision-making self-efficacy and found that college students with full-time or part-time work experience had higher career decision-making self-efficacy than those without work experience. Zhang (2008) found that there was a significant difference in career efficacy between second and junior college students with or without internship or work experience. Students who had internship or work experience, had thought about career direction, and had started making career decisions would have a more practical and in-depth understanding of abilities, interests, and values in practice, and career goals were also relatively clear, resulting in higher career efficacy. Yang & Zhang (2015) found that although there was no statistical difference in career decision-making self-efficacy among medical and technical undergraduate students in terms of whether they had part-time work experience, students with part-time work experience scored significantly higher than those without part-time work experience.

Fifth, there was no significant difference in overall career decision-making self-efficacy between only child and non-only child students. The research results of Zhang (2007) and others indicated that there was no significant difference in career decision-making self-efficacy between only child and non-only child. The research results of Peng (2001) also indicated that there was no significant difference in the total score of career decision-making self-efficacy between only child and non-only child. However, only child tended to be more self-reliant. They had a higher level of confidence in social communication, and these factors may have had a positive effect on career decision-making self-efficacy. Zhang & Shi (2014) found that being an only child did not affect the level of self-efficacy in student career decision-making. Li & Hu (2020) found that there was no significant difference in the overall scale and dimensions of career decision-making self-efficacy among hearing-impaired college students, whether they have part-time experience or not.

## Conclusions

There was no significant difference in the students' perceived career decision-making self-efficacy in grade, birthplace, whether they have part-time experience or not, and whether only child or not. There was a significant difference in gender. From the five scale dimensions, there were significant differences in each dimension in the above aspects. Based on the analysis of the current situation and differences in career decision-making self-efficacy among students mentioned above, beneficial experiences and methods worth learning and learning from were obtained, and the following suggestions were proposed for the sustainable development of S College in Yunnan Province:

Firstly, it should pay attention to the female population. For example, group counseling, individual consultation, etc., could be carried out. Relevant career assessment scales could be used to find careers that match the personality. Career experience or simulation activities could also be used to let students experience the workplace in a lively and interesting way. At the same time, students should be given positive feedback, and in the process help students improve of professional efficacy, alleviate students' negative concepts and anxiety about the future, and allow students to approach career decisions in a way that reduces stress and increases motivation, instead of fear and anxiety.

Secondly, it should pay attention to the group of graduates. For senior students, schools should focus on guiding them in establishing job search goals, creating personalized resumes, conducting simulation training, and could also hold small-scale job interview coaching. Through simulation interviews, students could practice on-site, open, and gain subjective positive experiences.

Thirdly, it should pay attention to students from rural areas. more opportunities were provided for rural students to learn and improve qualities, such as providing work-study positions and prioritizing them when arranging internship positions. Rural college students were guided to change employment concepts, set reasonable career goals, and adjust employment expectations based on environment, personal conditions, and social needs. For example, focus was placed on promoting national policies such as the "Three Supports and One Assistance" and the Western Plan to encourage them to work in underdeveloped areas and grassroots areas.

Fourthly, students were encouraged to participate in practical activities both on and off campus actively. For example, schools organized various subject competitions, social practices, volunteer service activities, innovation and entrepreneurship competitions, etc., so that students had more opportunities to play a role in areas of expertise, experience the joy of success, and enhance career decision-making self-efficacy.

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