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## **Investigating Career Decision Self-Efficacy, Internship Efficacy, and Career Readiness among Undergraduate Students: A Review**

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### **Abstract**

The transition from academic life to the professional world is a pivotal phase for undergraduates. During this phase, they develop career decision self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and career readiness, which are important milestones indicating their preparedness for the transition. This study examines the interplay between these elements and their impact on students' academic and professional journeys, drawing on Bandura's work on self-efficacy. The research is conducted through a systematic review of existing literature, exploring the influences of career decision self-efficacy, internship experiences, and career readiness on undergraduate students. The study identifies methodological challenges and issues related to the interpretation of statistical data, proposing solutions to overcome them. It examines the role of in-school programs, perceptions of discrimination, personality traits, environmental and personal factors, and the effectiveness of internships in enhancing career readiness, highlighting the multifaceted nature of preparing students for their professional futures.

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The study also discusses the implications of these findings for educational strategies and career guidance practices, enriching pedagogical practices, and providing insights into improving undergraduates' academic and professional development, facilitating a smoother transition from academia to the professional world.

**Keywords:** Career Decision Self-Efficacy; Internship Efficacy; Career Readiness ;systematic review.

## **1. Introduction**

The academic and professional journey of undergraduate students is a complex tapestry woven with various threads, among which career decision self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and career readiness stand out as pivotal elements [1]. These components not only mark significant milestones in a student's journey but also serve as key indicators of their preparedness to transition from the academic world into the professional realm. The exploration of these facets provides invaluable insights into the dynamics of educational and career development processes, thereby contributing to the enrichment of pedagogical practices and career guidance frameworks. Career decision self-efficacy, a concept derived from Bandura's seminal work on self-efficacy, encapsulates an individual's belief in their ability to make informed career decisions [2]. This self-assurance is crucial as it influences not only the choices students make regarding their majors and career paths but also their overall trajectory in the professional world. Internship efficacy, on the other hand, pertains to the confidence students harbor in their capacity to apply academic knowledge in real-world settings, a factor that significantly enhances their practical understanding and professional acumen [3]. Career readiness, a multifaceted construct, encompasses the preparedness of students to enter the workforce, highlighting the critical role of skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for career success Reference [4].

While the investigation into these areas is undeniably essential, it is not devoid of challenges. These challenges range from methodological issues such as sample selection and data collection to the interpretation of complex statistical data and adherence to rigorous ethical standards. The present study aims to shed light on these challenges, offering a comprehensive analysis of the hurdles encountered in research on career decision self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and career readiness among undergraduates. Furthermore, it proposes a suite of solutions aimed at addressing these challenges, thereby paving the way for more robust and insightful research outcomes. This research endeavor embarks on an ambitious quest to dissect these critical elements and their interrelations within the academic ecosystem. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration of the challenges inherent in studying these critical facets of undergraduate education and career preparation. It underscores the importance of such research in enhancing educational strategies and career guidance practices, with the ultimate goal of better equipping students for their professional lives. Through this examination, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on improving career readiness among undergraduates, thereby facilitating a smoother transition from academia to the professional world.

## **2. Method**

In the endeavor to explore the interconnections among career decision self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and career readiness within the undergraduate student population, this study meticulously employs a systematic review

approach. This methodical strategy is pivotal for delving deep into the existing body of literature, with the primary aim of fostering a thorough comprehension of these interrelated domains. The systematic review approach is instrumental in this context due to its structured nature, which facilitates a transparent and unbiased examination of pertinent studies, thereby ensuring the reliability of the synthesized evidence.

The initial phase of the review process involves a precise articulation of the research question, which serves as the guiding beacon throughout the investigation. The focal point of this inquiry is to unravel how undergraduate students' perceptions of their ability to make career-related decisions (career decision self-efficacy) influence their performance in internships (internship efficacy) and their overall preparedness for their future careers (career readiness). This investigation also extends to examining the potential intermediary role of career decision self-efficacy between internship efficacy and career readiness.

To maintain the relevance and focus of the review, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria is meticulously defined. These criteria are essential for filtering the literature and ensuring that the review encapsulates studies that are directly pertinent to the defined population (undergraduate students), the specific context (internship experiences and career readiness), and the outcomes of interest (measures of self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and career readiness).

The literature search strategy is expansive, encompassing several academic databases to ensure a comprehensive collection of relevant studies. Keywords related to the core themes of career decision self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and career readiness are employed to navigate through databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Scopus, aiming to capture a broad spectrum of scholarly work on the subject.

Following the literature search, a systematic screening process is undertaken. Initially, studies are filtered based on their titles and abstracts, with a subsequent full-text review to assess their eligibility against the predefined criteria. This critical step ensures that only studies that meet the specific requirements are included in the review, a process typically undertaken by two independent reviewers to guarantee objectivity and reliability.

Data extraction from the selected studies is carried out using a standardized format, capturing essential information such as study design, participant characteristics, and key findings related to career decision self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and career readiness. This step is crucial for aggregating relevant data for further analysis.

The methodological quality of the included studies is rigorously assessed to ascertain their reliability and validity. This quality assessment is a vital component of the review process, as it aids in the interpretation of the findings and gauges the strength of the evidence presented.

In synthesizing the data, the study endeavors to identify common patterns and variations across the included studies. This synthesis may encompass narrative summaries, thematic analyses, or, where applicable, quantitative techniques such as meta-analysis, providing a nuanced understanding of the literature.

The discussion and conclusion sections of the study contextualize the synthesized findings within the broader literature landscape. This part of the review highlights significant insights, delineates the implications for

educational practice, pinpoints gaps in the existing research, and outlines recommendations for future inquiries.

Finally, the review process and its outcomes are meticulously documented and reported, adhering to established guidelines such as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). This structured reporting ensures transparency and facilitates the reproducibility of the review.

By leveraging a systematic review method and adhering to a rigorous review process, this study aspires to offer a comprehensive and trustworthy synthesis of the literature on career decision self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and career readiness among undergraduate students. This endeavor not only enriches the academic discourse but also provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers, thereby contributing to the enhancement of career guidance practices and the preparation of students for their imminent professional journeys.

### **3.Literature Review**

#### ***3.1 Career Decision Self-Efficacy***

The journey of career decision-making is a pivotal aspect of an individual's educational and professional development, intertwining personal beliefs, societal influences, and educational experiences. Recent research has delved into the multifarious factors that shape career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) among students [5]-[10]. This review synthesizes these insights, focusing on how in-school programs, perceptions of discrimination, personality traits, and environmental and personal factors contribute to the development of CDSE. By examining the interplay between these elements, we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in nurturing confident and prepared individuals ready to navigate the ever-evolving career landscape.

References [5] assessed the impact of a concise in-school program on enhancing students' career decision self-efficacy and the alignment of their career and educational aspirations. The program notably fostered better alignment between students' career goals and educational plans, alongside a marked improvement in certain aspects of career decision self-efficacy.

References [6] investigated how the anticipation of racial and gender discrimination might affect elements crucial to forming career aspirations. They discovered that for boys, the expectation of a racially hostile work environment adversely affected their career decision self-efficacy. However, a positive link was observed between career decision self-efficacy, vocational outcome expectations, and the establishment of career goals.

References [7] explored the predictive power of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) concerning career decision self-efficacy, beyond the influence of general self-efficacy. The findings indicated that while the CAAS total score could predict career decision self-efficacy beyond general self-efficacy, it had minimal additional predictive value for other aspects like occupational self-efficacy and career indecision.

References. [8] delved into how future time perspective (FTP) might mediate the relationship between personality traits and career decision-making self-efficacy, as well as career indecision, in the context of sustainable career management. Their research showed that traits such as extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism indirectly

influenced career decision self-efficacy and career indecision through FTP.

References [9] analyzed the effect of perceived parenting styles, thinking styles, and gender on the career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) of 617 high school students in Jakarta, Indonesia, highlighting the complex interplay between these factors and CDSE.

References [10] explored the relationship between individual and environmental factors and their collective impact on career decision self-efficacy and happiness, revealing positive correlations with family influence and academic satisfaction.

The body of research presented herein elucidates the intricate web of factors that influence career decision self-efficacy among students. From the enhancement of aspirational alignment through targeted in-school interventions [5] to the nuanced impacts of anticipated discrimination [6], and from the mediating role of future time perspective [8] to the foundational influences of parenting styles, thinking styles, and gender [9], each study contributes a unique piece to the puzzle. Furthermore, the collective impact of individual and environmental factors on CDSE and happiness [10] underscores the need for a holistic approach in educational and career counseling practices. By embracing the insights garnered from this research, educators, counselors, and policymakers can better support students in developing the self-efficacy required to make informed, confident career decisions in an increasingly complex professional world.

### **3.2 Internship Efficacy**

In the evolving landscape of higher education and professional training, internships have emerged as a critical bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application, significantly impacting students' readiness for the workforce [11]. Recent research has delved into the nuanced dynamics of how internships, coupled with innovative educational models, contribute to enhancing students' self-efficacy, motivation, and overall career preparedness [12]-[18]. These studies collectively explore the intersection of educational psychology, business management principles, and pedagogical strategies to offer a comprehensive understanding of the role of practical experiences in shaping students' professional identities and competencies. This body of research not only sheds light on the direct outcomes of internship experiences but also examines the mediating and moderating factors that influence these outcomes, providing valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and students alike.

References [11] highlights an innovative internship-classroom model that boosts student motivation and self-efficacy by merging cultural frameworks with practical application projects. References [12] explore the role of interns' trust in their supervisors in enhancing the relationship between a proactive personality and performance, mediated by internship self-efficacy. References [13] investigate the differential impacts of major-related and nonmajor-related internships on graduates' starting salaries and career outcomes. References [14] delves into the influence of internships on students' career decision-making self-efficacy, highlighting the mediating effects of internship satisfaction and career commitment. References [15] aim to evaluate the moderating effect of self-efficacy on how accounting training and internship experiences contribute to job readiness. References [16] examine the interplay between preservice teachers' professional identities, self-efficacy, and learning engagement

during their teaching internships. References [17] provide insights into the effectiveness of in-service teacher training programs in rural China. References [18] report on a two-armed, randomized, controlled trial focusing on clinical internship practices among nursing students.

The confluence of research spanning from References [11] to References [18] paints a detailed picture of the transformative power of internships in the educational journey of students across various disciplines. By integrating real-world experiences with academic learning, these studies underscore the potential of internships to not only enhance career decision-making self-efficacy and job readiness but also to foster a deeper sense of professional identity and engagement. The findings from this research underscore the importance of trust, intrinsic motivation, and the alignment of educational pursuits with professional aspirations in maximizing the benefits of internships. Moreover, the exploration of the impact of various internship types and the contextual factors surrounding these experiences offers a nuanced understanding of how to best prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the modern workforce. As higher education continues to adapt to the demands of an ever-changing job market, the insights gleaned from this research provide a roadmap for creating more effective, engaging, and empowering learning environments that bridge the gap between theory and practice.

### ***3.3 Challenges of Career Readiness among Undergraduates Students in China***

The issue of low employability rates among graduates is a pressing concern that has garnered attention from various scholars [19,27]. This multifaceted problem encompasses numerous challenges and factors that impede graduates' ability to secure appropriate employment. Career readiness poses several challenges for undergraduate students, including difficulties in selecting a major and career path, lack of development in employability skills, particularly in communication, and the need for enhanced support from educators in providing relevant experiences and career advice [19,21,22,24]. Furthermore, the issue of low self-regulation among students contributes to career indecisiveness, further complicating their employment prospects [25].

In China, the situation is exacerbated by several drawbacks in the adult academic credentials education system, including low professional quality and inadequate comprehensive abilities, leading to a diminished employment rate [26]. Economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic have led to low employment confidence among college students [28], and difficulties in career decision-making influenced by various factors including societal pressures [29]. Moreover, international students in China face additional challenges in multicultural classrooms that affect their learning and career preparation [30].

This research aims to investigate the influence of career decision self-efficacy among undergraduate students in Xi'an on their internship effectiveness and overall career readiness. It also explores the mediating role of career decision self-efficacy in the relationship between internship effectiveness and career readiness [19,27]. This study is significant both theoretically and empirically, as it provides insights into the factors influencing undergraduate students' career preparedness within higher education. By understanding how career decision self-efficacy impacts internship effectiveness and career readiness, this research can inform educational institutions and students about enhancing career guidance and support mechanisms, thereby facilitating a smoother transition into the professional realm.

In conclusion, while existing studies offer valuable insights into the complexities of employability issues, they often focus on specific contexts or aspects. A holistic approach, considering both structural and systemic elements of education and employment, is essential for addressing the broad problem of low employability rates effectively [19,30]. This research contributes to this endeavor by exploring the role of career decision self-efficacy in enhancing internship effectiveness and career readiness among undergraduate students in Xi'an, aiming to provide comprehensive support for their career development journey.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In response to the growing concern over the challenges faced by undergraduate students in achieving career decision self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and career readiness, a comprehensive set of strategies has been put forth. These strategies are designed to tackle the issue from multiple angles, encompassing improvements in career guidance programs, curricular enhancements, fostering stronger ties between academia and industry, leveraging the latest technological advancements, cultivating a supportive university environment, and dedicating efforts towards continuous research and improvement.

A critical component of these strategies is the enhancement of career guidance programs within universities. Recognizing the pivotal role of comprehensive career counseling, efforts are being made to integrate assessments that evaluate students' personality traits and career aptitudes. Such assessments aim to provide students with clearer insights into their career preferences and potential paths, thereby facilitating more informed decision-making processes in their career choices. This initiative draws upon the documented importance of career counseling in guiding students through their career trajectories.

Furthermore, the establishment of mentorship programs that connect students with professionals in their fields of interest has been identified as a key strategy. By providing students with real-world exposure and role models, these programs aim to boost students' confidence in their career decisions, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy.

In terms of curricular improvements, there is a push towards embedding career readiness components directly into the curriculum. This involves ensuring that students are equipped with essential skills, such as resume writing, job search strategies, and interview techniques, right from their academic journey. This approach is in line with recommendations from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), which advocates for the integration of career readiness competencies into higher education curricula.

Experiential learning, through internships, co-op programs, and project-based learning, is also being promoted as a critical bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Such experiential learning opportunities are seen as vital in enhancing students' understanding of their fields and improving their readiness for the workforce.

Strengthening industry-academia collaboration is another key strategy. By establishing robust partnerships with industries, universities can provide students with valuable real-world experiences and insights into the job market, ensuring that academic programs are closely aligned with industry needs. Additionally, the formation of industry advisory boards is advocated to provide input into curriculum development, ensuring that educational programs

meet both current and future industry requirements.

The utilization of digital career platforms and online self-efficacy workshops represents the leveraging of technology and digital tools in these strategies. Digital platforms that offer virtual internships and webinars with professionals can significantly expand students' exposure to various career paths and industry expectations. Online workshops focused on building self-efficacy are also being offered to help students develop essential skills for successful career planning and execution.

Creating a supportive university environment is another crucial element of these strategies. Facilitating peer support groups and establishing mechanisms for continuous feedback during internships are seen as ways to foster a sense of belonging and mutual support among students, allowing them to adjust and improve their performance in real-time.

Lastly, the importance of research and continuous improvement is underscored through the recommendation of conducting longitudinal studies and encouraging interdisciplinary research collaborations. These efforts aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing career decision self-efficacy and readiness, incorporating diverse perspectives from psychology, education, and business studies.

By adopting these multifaceted strategies, universities are poised to better support undergraduate students in navigating their career paths, ultimately enhancing their career decision self-efficacy, internship efficacy, and overall career readiness.

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