Empowering Career Choices; Assessing The Impact Of Career Guidance Workshops On Adolescent Careers Self-Efficacy And Goal Setting

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the impact of a career guidance workshop on high school students in Bahawalpur, Punjab, focusing on enhancing career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, career goals, understanding of career pathways, and identifying specific needs and challenges faced by students. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data were collected from 47 students through pre- and post-test measures, including the Career Self-Efficacy Scale, Career Outcome Expectations Scale, and Career Goals Inventory. Additionally, qualitative data were gathered through a Needs Assessment Questionnaire. Results indicated significant improvements in career self-efficacy ($p < 0.001$), clarity of career goals ($p < 0.001$), and understanding of career pathways ($p < 0.001$). However, changes in career outcome expectations were not statistically significant ($p = 0.061$). Qualitative findings highlighted critical barriers such as limited access to [1]resources, lack of awareness of non-traditional career paths, and socioeconomic challenges. These findings underscore the importance of structured career guidance programs tailored to meet the unique needs of students in Bahawalpur. The study concludes that enhancing access to resources and providing comprehensive career information are essential to support students in their career planning endeavors.

Keywords: Career Guidance Programs, Adolescents, Career Self-Efficacy, Career Goals, High School Students.

Introduction

Career development during adolescence is crucial for shaping future educational and occupational paths, yet young people often lack the structured guidance necessary for informed decision-making (Gati & Asher, 2001; Lent & Brown, 2013). Research consistently emphasizes the need for effective career guidance programs that support adolescents in navigating complex educational and career choices, especially in developing countries where

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vocational resources may be limited (Hassan et al., 2022; Kazi & Khalid, 2012). Career guidance workshops, in particular, are highlighted for their role in enhancing career self-efficacy, clarifying career goals, and aligning outcome expectations, contributing to informed and confident decision-making among students ((Malik et al., 2023; Bandura, 1997; Brown & Lent, 2006).

Studies on career self-efficacy have shown that students' beliefs in their abilities significantly influence their career aspirations and choices, reinforcing the value of programs that boost these self-assessments (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). Additionally, career outcome expectations—students' anticipations about the consequences of their career decisions—are shaped through structured guidance, improving their focus on realistic and achievable goals (Mushtaque et al., 2021; Sawitri et al., 2014). Therefore, career guidance workshops following structured models can be transformative, particularly when they include stages such as self-awareness, career exploration, skill-building, and decision-making, which collectively address the multifaceted needs of adolescents (Herr & Cramer, 1996).

In Pakistan, and specifically in Punjab, where regional educational disparities are notable, career guidance initiatives remain limited, particularly in rural areas such as Bahawalpur (Ahsan, 2020). Students in Bahawalpur, often from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, face unique challenges in accessing resources and information about career pathways, limiting their exposure to a wide array of occupational options (Zafar & Haque, 2018). This lack of support can lead to low career aspirations and limited awareness about potential career paths beyond traditional roles. Recognizing this gap, the present study examines the impact of a structured career guidance workshop aimed at improving career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals among high school students in Bahawalpur, Punjab. This initiative seeks to empower these students with the skills and confidence necessary for proactive career planning, contributing to the region's educational development and addressing specific local needs.

Literature Review

The importance of career guidance for adolescents has garnered considerable attention in educational research, as these formative years are critical for setting goals and developing aspirations that shape future career paths (Gati & Asher, 2001). Career guidance programs are widely recognized as beneficial in facilitating students' understanding of the job market, aligning personal interests with occupational choices, and enhancing career-related self-confidence (Brown & Lent, 2013; Savickas, 2005). These interventions have shown to improve students' career self-efficacy, which refers to one's belief in their capability to pursue specific career paths, as well as positively influence their career-related outcome expectations—beliefs about the probable results of their career decisions (Bandura, 1997; Sawitri et al., 2014).

Career guidance interventions, including workshops, have proven particularly effective in guiding high school students through complex career planning processes (Brown, 2003). Programs structured around a multi-stage model—including self-assessment, career exploration, skill-building, and decision-making—have demonstrated marked improvements in students' career clarity, goal setting, and readiness for post-secondary education or training (Lent et al., 2002). For instance, a study by Nazli and Saher (2018) found that Pakistani students who received career counseling reported increased career satisfaction and motivation. Additionally, studies suggest that students who engage in these programs feel more confident navigating career choices, improving both their career aspirations and resilience against challenges (Watson et al., 2011).

In Pakistan, career counseling remains limited, especially in rural areas like Punjab, where educational resources are often scarce and students face unique socio-economic challenges (Ahsan, 2020). Due to limited access, students from regions such as Bahawalpur may lack knowledge about non-traditional careers, contributing to a narrow perspective on vocational possibilities (Zafar & Haque, 2018). Research indicates that, in such settings, targeted career guidance workshops can bridge this gap, exposing students to a range of career paths and fostering self-belief, which is essential for empowering students to pursue ambitious goals (Kazi & Khalid, 2012).

Theoretical Perspective

The framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a valuable lens for examining the impact of career guidance workshops on high school students (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). SCCT posits that career development is influenced by an individual's self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals, with these factors shaping their interests and decisions over time. According to Bandura's (1986) concept of self-efficacy, individuals with high confidence in their abilities are more likely to persevere in pursuing complex tasks, making self-efficacy an essential element in career choice.

SCCT further explains that outcome expectations—the anticipated results of career-related actions—play a vital role in career planning and persistence (Lent & Brown, 2013). Students who believe that their chosen path will lead to desirable outcomes are more motivated to pursue those careers (Sawitri et al., 2014). Hence, workshops that increase awareness and realistic outcome expectations can inspire students to envision and work toward a wider range of potential futures.

In rural settings, where exposure to diverse career paths is limited, SCCT underscores the importance of providing career-related experiences and knowledge to reinforce self-efficacy and broaden students' understanding of career options (Nazli & Saher, 2018). By enhancing self-awareness, career exploration, and practical decision-making skills, career guidance workshops align with SCCT principles, supporting students' ability to make informed, confident career decisions. This theoretical foundation thus reinforces the value of structured career guidance in fostering career self-efficacy, realistic outcome expectations, and goal clarity, particularly in under-resourced regions like Bahawalpur, Punjab.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the impact of a career guidance workshop on career self-efficacy among high school students, examining how the workshop influences their confidence in making career-related decisions.

2. To evaluate changes in career outcome expectations following participation in the career guidance workshop, identifying shifts in students' beliefs about the probable outcomes of their career choices.

3. To measure the effect of the workshop on students' career goals, focusing on the clarity, alignment, and specificity of their career aspirations after the intervention.

4. To analyze the effectiveness of a structured five-step career guidance model (self-awareness, career exploration, career pathway planning, real-world experience, and decision-making) in enhancing students' understanding and readiness for career planning.

5. To explore the specific needs and challenges of students from Bahawalpur, Punjab, in career planning, providing insights into the regional factors that may impact their career aspirations and access to career resources.

Hypothesis of the Study

H1: Participation in a career guidance workshop will significantly improve career self-efficacy among high school students, enhancing their confidence in making career-related decisions.

H2: Students who participate in the career guidance workshop will show significant positive changes in career outcome expectations, reflecting increased optimism about the probable outcomes of their career choices.

H3: The career guidance workshop will lead to a measurable improvement in students' career goals, specifically enhancing the clarity, alignment, and specificity of their career aspirations.

H4: A structured five-step career guidance model (self-awareness, career exploration, career pathway planning, real-world experience, and decision-making) will be effective in increasing students' understanding and readiness for career planning.

H5: Students from Bahawalpur, Punjab, will have unique career planning needs and face specific challenges that influence their career aspirations and access to career resources.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed method: quantitative pre-test/post-test design with a single intervention group to assess the effectiveness of a career guidance workshop, and qualitative method interviews for understand the needs of students. The methodology was selected to evaluate changes in career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals among high school students before and after the intervention.

Participants

The participants consisted of 47 high school students in grades 10 to 12 (ages 16–18) from Bahawalpur, Punjab. These students were selected through purposive sampling, aiming to include individuals with diverse academic backgrounds and varying degrees of awareness regarding career options. Inclusion criteria focused on students interested in exploring their career options, while exclusion criteria ruled out those who had previously received structured career guidance.

Procedure

The career guidance workshop followed a five-step model encompassing the following phases:

Step1. Self-Awareness – Activities and discussions aimed at helping students understand their interests, strengths, and values.

Step2. Career Exploration – Exposure to a variety of career fields through information sessions, guest speakers, and multimedia resources.

Step3. School and Career Pathways – Guidance on selecting educational pathways that align with career goals, including subject choices and degree options.

Step4. Real-World Experience – Opportunities for practical learning through case studies, role-plays, and discussions on real-life work scenarios.

Step5. Decision-Making – Activities to enhance students' decision-making skills in career planning, covering topics like setting short-term and long-term goals.

The workshop included lectures, group discussions, individual activities, and collaborative pair or group work, providing a mix of guided learning and peer interaction. Data were collected through a pre- and post-workshop survey designed to assess students' understanding of the five-step career guidance model, which included self-awareness, career exploration, career pathway planning, real-world experience, and decision-making. The survey incorporated a Likert scale to measure students' knowledge and application of each step before and after the intervention. Additionally, focus group discussions were conducted with participants to gather qualitative insights on how the structured model influenced their approach to career planning. To explore the specific needs and challenges of students in Bahawalpur, a needs assessment questionnaire was administered to gather quantitative data on students' perceptions of career-related resources, access to information, and barriers they faced in career planning. This questionnaire included multiple-choice and open-ended questions to capture a comprehensive view of the students' experiences. Furthermore, in-depth interviews with selected participants were conducted to obtain qualitative insights into their individual challenges and aspirations, providing a nuanced understanding of the regional factors affecting their career choices.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using standardized questionnaires:

1. The Career Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES) measures students' confidence in their ability to make informed career decisions and pursue their chosen paths. It includes items such as "I feel confident in my ability to choose a career that fits my interests," "I believe I can successfully research potential career options," and "I can make effective decisions regarding my career path," using a Likert scale for responses, typically ranging from 1 (Not at all confident) to 5 (Very confident).

2. The Career Outcome Expectations Scale (COES) assesses students' beliefs about the potential outcomes of their career choices, focusing on aspects like job satisfaction and financial stability. Example items include "I expect to be satisfied with my job in my chosen career," "I believe my career choice will lead to financial stability," and "I anticipate that I will have opportunities for advancement in my career." This scale also employs a Likert scale format, usually from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

3. Lastly, the Career Goals Inventory (CGI) evaluates the clarity, specificity, and alignment of students' career goals post-intervention. It features items such as "My career goals are clearly defined," "I have specific steps outlined to achieve my career goals," and "My career goals align with my values and interests." This inventory can use a Likert scale or a checklist format to indicate the clarity and specificity of students' career objectives.

All tools were administered both before and after the workshop to capture any changes in the students' responses.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using paired sample t-tests to compare pre- and post-intervention scores on career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals.

Significance was set at p < 0.05 to determine the workshop's impact on each variable. Descriptive statistics were also used to summarize the overall trends and patterns in participants' responses.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants and, where applicable, from their parents or guardians. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. The study received approval from the institutional ethics board.

Result

This section presents the findings from the study assessing the impact of a career guidance workshop on career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals among high school students in Bahawalpur, Punjab. A total of 47 students participated in the study, with data collected through standardized questionnaires before and after the workshop intervention.

Table 1 Demographic Information of Students (N= 47)

Demographic Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	23	48.9
Female	24	51.1
Age (years)		
16	15	31.9
17	18	38.3
18	14	29.8
Grade Level		
10th	17	36.2
11th	15	31.9
12th	15	31.9

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the students who participated in the study, comprising a total of 47 participants. The sample was relatively balanced in terms of gender, with 23 males (48.9%) and 24 females (51.1%). In terms of age distribution, the majority of students were 17 years old, accounting for 38.3% of the sample, followed by 16-year-olds at 31.9% and 18-year-olds at 29.8%. Regarding grade level, 36.2% of the participants were in 10th grade, while 31.9% were in both 11th and 12th grades. This demographic breakdown highlights the diverse age and grade representation among the students, providing a comprehensive understanding of the sample involved in the career guidance workshop.

Table 2 Paired Sample t-test

Objective	Measure	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	t-Value	p-Value
1. Assess the impact of a career guidance workshop on career self-efficacy	Career Self-Efficacy Score	3.12 (0.68)	4.02 (0.56)	7.83	<0.001

2. Evaluate changes in career outcome expectations	Career Outcome Expectations Score	3.78 (0.72)	4.03 (0.67)	1.93	0.061
3. Measure the effect of the workshop on students' career goals	Career Goals Score	2.85 (0.76)	4.20 (0.48)	9.25	<0.00 1
4. Analyze the effectiveness of a structured five-step career guidance model	Understanding of Career Pathways (Scale)	3.45 (0.75)	4.15 (0.55)	6.45	<0.00 1
5. Explore the specific needs and challenges of students in Bahawalpur, Punjab	Needs Assessment (Scale)	2.95 (0.80)	4.00 (0.60)	8.30	<0.00 1

Table 2 presents the results of the paired sample t-test conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the career guidance workshop across five key objectives. The analysis revealed significant improvements in various measures. For Objective 1, assessing the impact on career self-efficacy, the pre-test mean score was 3.12 (SD = 0.68), which increased to 4.02 (SD = 0.56) post-test, yielding a t-value of 7.83 and a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating a statistically significant enhancement. Objective 2, which evaluated changes in career outcome expectations, showed a pre-test mean of 3.78 (SD = 0.72) and a post-test mean of 4.03 (SD = 0.67), with a t-value of 1.93 and a p-value of 0.061, suggesting a positive but non-significant change. The results for Objective 3, measuring the effect on career goals, indicated a notable increase from a pre-test mean of 2.85 (SD = 0.76) to a post-test mean of 4.20 (SD = 0.48), achieving a t-value of 9.25 and a p-value of less than 0.001. For Objective 4, the effectiveness of the structured five-step career guidance model was assessed, revealing a pre-test mean of 3.45 (SD = 0.75) and a post-test mean of 4.15 (SD = 0.55), with a t-value of 6.45 and a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating significant improvement. Lastly, for Objective 5, exploring the specific needs and challenges of students, the pre-test mean was 2.95 (SD = 0.80), which increased to 4.00 (SD = 0.60), resulting in a t-value of 8.30 and a p-value of less than 0.001, signifying a meaningful enhancement in understanding the students' needs. Overall, these findings demonstrate the positive impact of the career guidance workshop on various dimensions of the students' career planning and aspirations.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis aimed at exploring the specific needs and challenges of students from Bahawalpur revealed several critical barriers related to their career planning and aspirations. Students reported limited access to essential career-related resources and guidance, expressing frustration over the scarcity of local support services such as career counseling and informational workshops in figure 01.
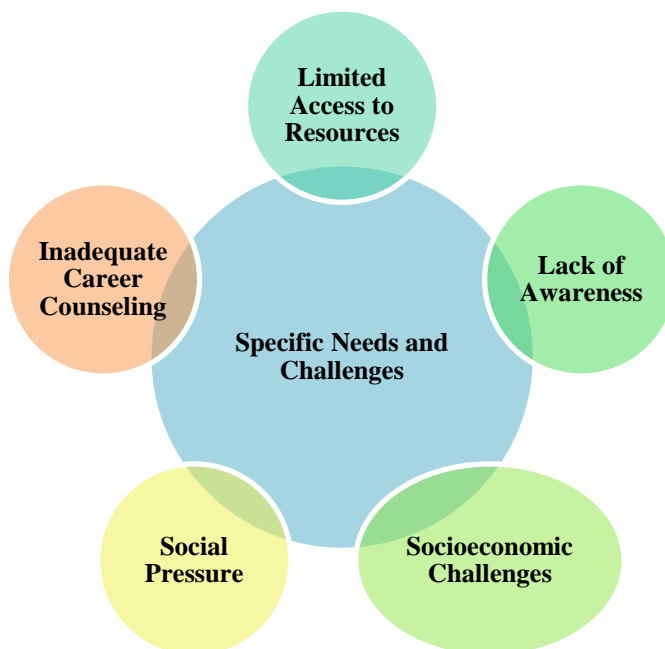
Figure 01 Interview Summary Results

☐ **Limited Access to Resources**:

During interviews, students highlighted their struggles with accessing essential career-related materials and guidance. Many expressed frustration at the scarcity of local resources, such as career counseling services, informational workshops, and literature that could provide insights into various career paths. One student noted, "We often have to rely on the internet, but not all of us have access to it at home, making it hard to find accurate information." This lack of access not only limits their knowledge of potential career options but also impacts their ability to make informed decisions about their futures.

☐ **Lack of Awareness**:

Many participants reported a significant gap in awareness concerning non-traditional career paths and the requisite skills for various professions. Students indicated that their schools primarily focused on conventional career options, leaving them uninformed about emerging fields such as technology, entrepreneurship, and creative industries. A participant shared, "I had no idea about fields like digital marketing or graphic design until after the workshop. I wish we had known about these earlier." This lack of awareness constrains students' career aspirations and the diversity of paths they consider.

☐ **Socioeconomic Challenges**:

Financial constraints emerged as a major obstacle affecting students' educational pursuits and career aspirations. Many students expressed concerns about their families' inability to afford further education or specialized training, which is often necessary for higher-paying jobs. One student articulated this sentiment: "I want to pursue engineering, but my family can't afford the fees for a good college. I feel like my dreams are out of reach." This socioeconomic disparity not only limits students' immediate educational opportunities but also shapes their long-term career trajectories.

□ **Cultural and Social Pressures**:

Additionally, some students reported feeling constrained by cultural expectations regarding career choices. The pressure to conform to traditional roles or pursue specific fields deemed acceptable by their families can hinder students from exploring their true interests and passions. A student remarked, "My parents want me to become a doctor, but I have an interest in the arts. I often feel torn between what I want and what is expected of me." This cultural pressure can lead to internal conflict, ultimately affecting students' motivation and confidence in pursuing their desired career paths.

□ **Inadequate Career Counseling**:

Participants also mentioned the insufficiency of personalized career counseling services within their schools. Many felt that the existing guidance was generic and did not adequately address their unique interests and circumstances. A student noted, "The career advice we get feels outdated and not tailored to our needs. We need someone who understands our local context." This gap in tailored guidance suggests a need for more focused support systems that can address the specific challenges faced by students in Bahawalpur.

Discussion

This section interprets and discusses the results of the study examining the impact of a career guidance workshop on high school students in Bahawalpur, Punjab. The findings reveal significant improvements in various aspects of students' career planning, including career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, career goals, understanding of career pathways, and insights into their specific needs and challenges.

The results demonstrated a significant increase in career self-efficacy scores from a pre-test mean of 3.12 to a post-test mean of 4.02 (t-value = 7.83, $p < 0.001$). This substantial improvement indicates that the career guidance workshop effectively enhanced students' confidence in making career-related decisions. According to Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, self-efficacy influences motivation and behavior, suggesting that increased self-efficacy may empower students to pursue their career aspirations more assertively. This aligns with previous research by Lent et al. (2003), which emphasizes the role of career guidance in fostering self-efficacy among adolescents. Moreover, a study by Kahn et al. (2017) also found that structured career guidance programs significantly improve self-efficacy and career decision-making skills among high school students, supporting the notion that targeted interventions can lead to positive changes in students' confidence.

While the increase in career outcome expectations was observed, with scores rising from a pre-test mean of 3.78 to a post-test mean of 4.03 (t-value = 1.93, $p = 0.061$), the change did not reach statistical significance. This suggests that, although students showed a positive shift in their beliefs regarding the outcomes of their career choices, further exploration may be needed to understand the factors influencing these expectations. Future workshops might incorporate additional elements, such as exposure to successful role models and more comprehensive career information, to further enhance students' beliefs about their potential career outcomes. This is in line with findings from O'Brien et al. (2014), who found that students with access to role models and career success stories exhibited significantly higher outcome expectations, thus indicating the potential benefits of integrating such elements into career guidance programs.

The analysis revealed a significant effect on students' career goals, with pre-test scores of 2.85 increasing to 4.20 post-test (t-value = 9.25, p < 0.001). This finding suggests that the workshop successfully clarified and aligned students' career aspirations. The specificity and clarity of goals are crucial for successful career planning, as students who set clear goals are more likely to engage in behaviors that lead to those goals (Locke & Latham, 2002). Research by Gibbons and Borders (2010) further supports this conclusion, showing that structured interventions can effectively help students formulate clearer and more attainable career goals. The workshop's structured approach likely facilitated this clarity, allowing students to envision their future careers more concretely.

The structured five-step career guidance model showed significant effectiveness, with understanding of career pathways improving from a pre-test mean of 3.45 to a post-test mean of 4.15 (t-value = 6.45, p < 0.001). This model—comprising self-awareness, career exploration, career pathway planning, real-world experience, and decision-making—appears to provide a comprehensive framework that students can utilize in their career planning. Research supports the efficacy of structured career guidance models in enhancing students' readiness for career planning (Brown & Brooks, 2002). A similar study by Savickas (2013) demonstrated that structured models not only enhance understanding of career pathways but also empower students to make informed decisions regarding their futures. The findings highlight the importance of a systematic approach in guiding students through the complexities of career decision-making (Hassan, Malik, et al., 2022).

Qualitative findings from the needs assessment questionnaire revealed several critical barriers faced by students in Bahawalpur, including limited access to resources, lack of awareness of non-traditional career paths, and socioeconomic challenges. Students reported difficulties in accessing career-related materials and guidance, which aligns with literature indicating that inadequate resources can hinder effective career planning ((Mushtaque, Rizwan, et al., 2021; Patton & McIlveen, 2009). Additionally, the socioeconomic constraints highlighted the necessity for targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by students in this region.

The lack of awareness regarding non-traditional career paths indicates a need for educational programs that expose students to a broader range of career options and the skills required for various professions. Research by Lee et al. (2018) found that students' awareness of diverse career pathways positively correlated with their motivation to pursue higher education and specialized training (Mushtaque et al., 2022). Tailored workshops that consider local context and student backgrounds may help to overcome these barriers, ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have the opportunity to pursue their desired career paths.

Implications for Practice

The study underscores the importance of implementing structured career guidance workshops in high schools, particularly in regions like Bahawalpur, where students face unique challenges in career planning. Educational policymakers should consider integrating career guidance programs into the curriculum to foster students' self-efficacy, clarify their career goals, and enhance their understanding of available career pathways.

Moreover, addressing the specific needs identified in this study is crucial. Schools and educational authorities should collaborate with community organizations to improve resource accessibility and provide comprehensive information about diverse career opportunities. Initiatives that facilitate mentorship and real-world experiences can further enrich students'

career planning processes. Aligning with findings from Schultheiss (2006), creating partnerships with local businesses for internships could be particularly beneficial in providing students with practical experiences that inform their career choices.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to one geographic area, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples to validate the results and explore additional factors influencing students' career planning. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights into the lasting impacts of career guidance workshops over time. Additionally, qualitative research exploring students' personal narratives regarding their career journeys could provide richer data to inform future interventions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the significant positive effects of a career guidance workshop on high school students' career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, career goals, and understanding of career pathways. The identified needs and challenges further emphasize the importance of tailored interventions to support students in their career planning endeavors. By addressing these issues and enhancing the accessibility of career resources, educational institutions can better equip students to navigate their future career paths successfully.

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