A Structural Model of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and Career Expectations Among Senior Students in Guangxi, China

[1]Liu Changbin, [2*]Jomphong Mongkhonvanit, and[3]LeeHsing Lu

Educational Administration Innovation, Graduate School of Education, Siam University, Thailand

Corresponding Author. E-mail: [1]554816991@qq.com, [2]jomphong@siam.edu, [3]leelu@mail.com

Received February 25, 2026; **Revised** March 28, 2026; **Accepted** April 21, 2026

Abstract

With the expansion of higher education and intensifying employment competition in China, understanding how senior students form career expectations has become increasingly important, particularly in less economically developed regions. Grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), this study examined how career-related parental support, peer influence, and emotional intelligence influenced career expectations through the mediating role of career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE), with gender as a moderating variable. A mixed-methods design was adopted. Quantitative data were collected from 409 final-year students across six normal universities in Guangxi, China, and analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM). Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured expert interviews and analyzed using thematic coding to triangulate the statistical findings.

Results indicated that career-related parental support, peer influence, and emotional intelligence all had significant positive effects on CDMSE. CDMSE, in turn, strongly predicted career expectations and served as a mediator linking contextual and personal factors to expected career outcomes. Gender moderated the relationship between CDMSE and career expectations, with stronger effects observed among female students. The findings highlighted CDMSE as a central psychological mechanism translating social support and emotional competence into higher career expectations. This study extended SCCT by integrating emotional intelligence and gender moderation into a unified structural model within a regional Chinese context. Practically, the findings suggest that normal universities should strengthen career guidance through structured self-efficacy training and emotional intelligence support, especially for senior students facing the school-to-work transition.

Keywords: Career Decision–Making Self–Efficacy; Career Expectations; Parental Support; Peer Influence; Emotional Intelligence; Gender Moderation

Introduction

China's higher education system has grown faster than ever in the last twenty years. This development has made it easier for people to get a college education, but it has also made the job market for recent graduates more competitive. This kind of stress is most clear in places where the economy is changing slowly and there isn't much industrial upgrading. For many recent graduates, the transition from university to professional work is no more a seamless or predictable process; it instead entails ambiguity, adaptation, and increased uncertainty. In this situation, how students build and control their career expectations has substantial effects on their mental health, as well as on their actual job choices and behavior.

Career expectations refer to the goals individuals anticipate achieving and the outcomes they believe are attainable in their future occupational paths. These expectations shape how students interpret labor market signals, evaluate professional opportunities, and invest effort in career exploration (Metz et al., 2009). Among students enrolled in normal universities—institutions primarily preparing future teachers—career pathways are frequently intertwined with regional public education systems. Recruitment policies, local demand for educators, and public–sector examinations significantly influence their options. Therefore, examining how such students construct their career expectations is essential for understanding their motivation and planning behavior during the graduation transition.

From a conceptual viewpoint, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) argues that career trajectories emerge through the reciprocal influence of environmental conditions and individual cognitive factors, rather than being driven by external circumstances or personal attributes alone (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). In this perspective, self–efficacy functions as a pivotal mechanism shaping behavior. Career decision–making self–efficacy (CDMSE) can be understood as individuals' confidence in their ability to clarify personal interests and strengths, seek and interpret career information, compare potential pathways, and finalize suitable occupational plans. Students with stronger confidence in their decision–making capabilities are generally more inclined to take initiative, formulate realistic and meaningful career objectives, and maintain consistent effort even in unstable or competitive employment contexts.

While earlier studies have shown that self–efficacy plays an important role in career development, fewer studies have explored how it connects social support, emotional ability, and career goals in Chinese normal universities. This research gap is especially important in Guangxi, where local economic conditions and school systems may shape students' career thinking differently from more developed regions. By examining how external support and personal psychological factors work together to influence career expectations, researchers can improve existing theories and design career guidance that better fits local realities. This study therefore aims to explore how senior students form and sustain their expectations about future work, focusing on the mediating role of self–efficacy in career decision–making.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the effects of career–related parental support, peer influence, and emotional intelligence on the career decision–making self–efficacy of senior students in Guangxi normal universities.

2. To investigate the effect of career decision–making self–efficacy on the career expectations of senior students in Guangxi normal universities.

3. To examine whether career decision–making self–efficacy mediates the relationships between career–related parental support, peer influence, emotional intelligence, and career expectations, and whether gender moderates the relationship between career decision–making self–efficacy and career expectations.

Literature Review

1. Social Support and Career Decision Processes

Studies on career development have continuously highlighted the significance of social support in influencing the profession–related perceptions and behaviors of young adults. Parental involvement is considered a particularly important form of support during late adolescence and early adulthood. Turner et al. (2003) created and validated a multidimensional career–related parental support scale, finding that emotional encouragement, role modeling, and practical assistance were closely associated with adolescents' confidence in their careers. Subsequent research has also focused on this issue among university students. For example, Metheny and McWhirter (2013) found that even after considering socioeconomic background, perceived family

support remained a significant predictor of self–efficacy and outcome expectations in university students' career decisions.

Peer interaction is another crucial social environment for career development. Parents often set the framework for their children's lives, but friends can offer help through comparison, role models, and emotional support. A study by Kashif, Shaheen, and Amjad (2021) found that peer attachment significantly enhances college students' self–efficacy when making career decisions. This means that having supportive friends can help people approach job opportunities with greater confidence. These findings collectively demonstrate that both parental and peer contexts serve as critical environmental resources influencing individuals' career–related perceptions. Nonetheless, insufficient focus has been directed towards the simultaneous functioning of various social forces within particular regional or institutional contexts.

2. Emotional Intelligence and Career Decision–Making Self–Efficacy

Beyond contextual support, individual psychological resources also play a central role in career development. Emotional intelligence (EI), commonly defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), has been increasingly linked to adaptive academic and vocational outcomes. Individuals with higher EI tend to manage stress more effectively and maintain greater clarity when facing complex decisions.

Empirical research has demonstrated a direct association between EI and career decision–making self–efficacy. Jiang (2016), in a study of Chinese university students, found that emotional regulation and self–emotion appraisal significantly predicted higher levels of career decision confidence. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2019) showed that EI influences career decision–making self–efficacy indirectly through enhanced goal and professional commitment. These findings suggest that emotionally competent individuals are better equipped to translate aspirations into structured career plans.

At the same time, emotional intelligence does not operate by itself. Its influence depends on other factors, such as encouragement from family or teachers and the overall learning environment. Career development usually results from the combined effect of personal ability and external support. However, research that looks at emotional intelligence together with different forms of social support in one model is still relatively limited.

3. Career Decision–Making Self–Efficacy and Career Expectations

Career decision–making self–efficacy (CDMSE) is the belief that you can do the things you need to do to make career choices (Taylor & Betz, 1983). A body of studies indicates that CDMSE

is significantly correlated with exploratory activities, decisiveness, and vocational adaptation. Recently, researchers have investigated its correlation with career expectations and result views.

Odacı, Çıkrıkçı, and Degerli (2022) reported that students with stronger problem–solving ability tend to show higher career decision–making self–efficacy (CDMSE) and more positive expectations about their future jobs. In other words, self–efficacy appears to connect thinking skills with beliefs about future career outcomes. Gianakos (1999) earlier pointed out that people who followed clearer and more stable career directions tended to feel more confident about their choices and had more practical expectations about their future jobs. Taken together, these findings indicate that confidence in making career decisions does more than help people move forward in their careers; it also influences how they think about and judge their future opportunities.

Even though evidence for these relationships is increasing, several issues remain unclear. Many studies focus only on either environmental support or personal traits, instead of examining how they work together in one model. In addition, differences in regional labor markets may change how self–efficacy relates to career expectations, yet such contextual factors are rarely studied in less developed areas. Therefore, it is necessary to build a framework that considers social support, emotional abilities, and career decision confidence at the same time, in order to better understand how they influence students' expectations about their future careers.

Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure 1, this study proposes three antecedent variables—career–related parental support, peer influence, and emotional intelligence—that directly influence Career Decision–Making Self–Efficacy (CDMSE) (H1–H3). These factors are expected to strengthen students' confidence in making career decisions. CDMSE is further hypothesized to have a direct and significant effect on career expectations (H4). In addition, CDMSE is proposed to mediate the relationships between each antecedent variable and career expectations, specifically mediating the effects of career–related parental support (H5), peer influence (H6), and emotional intelligence (H7). Gender is included as a moderating variable (H8) to examine whether the relationship between CDMSE and career expectations differs between male and female students. Overall, the framework integrates both mediating and moderating mechanisms to explain the formation of career expectations among senior students.

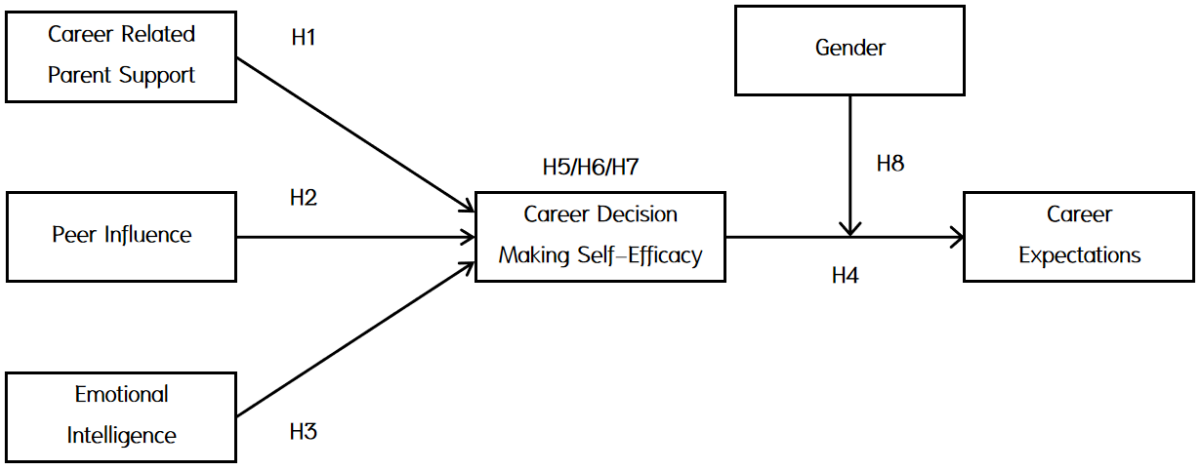


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework (Source: Constructed by researchers)

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods design to examine how career-related parental support, peer influence, and emotional intelligence shape students' career expectations, with Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) as a mediator and gender as a moderator. The quantitative phase uses an online, close-ended questionnaire administered via WJX to test the hypothesised relationships. The qualitative phase uses semi-structured expert interviews to contextualise and validate survey findings and to strengthen practical recommendations through triangulation.

Population and Sample

The target population comprises final-year undergraduate students (Class of 2025) enrolled in teacher education programmes at six regular universities in Guangxi Province, China (total population = 30,223). These universities include Guangxi Normal University, Nanning Normal University, Yulin Normal University, Guangxi Minzu Normal University, Guangxi Science and Technology Normal University, and Guangxi Vocational Normal University. A minimum sample size was calculated using parameters such as confidence level (95%), margin of error (5%), and response distribution (50%), yielding a corrected minimum of approximately 372. To offset non-response and invalid questionnaires, the sample was increased by 10%, resulting in a final target of 409 respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select the six universities, followed by stratified simple random sampling within each institution to ensure proportional representation. The student sample was proportionally allocated across institutions and teacher-education groups to improve representativeness within the target population.

Research Instruments

Based on a conceptual framework and referencing existing questionnaires, we developed a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire measures five constructs: career-related parental support, peer influence, emotional intelligence, career development self-efficacy (CDMSE), and career aspirations. The questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale and includes back-scored items where necessary. Three experts assessed the content validity of the questionnaire using the Item-Goal Consistency Index (IOC); items below the acceptable threshold were modified or removed. We pre-tested the questionnaire with 30 recent graduates to refine its clarity and assess its internal consistency. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha in SPSS; all scales were expected to meet acceptable reliability standards before full deployment. A forward translation and back-translation procedure was applied to ensure linguistic equivalence for the Chinese version.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected primarily through WJX during November–December 2024 across the six universities. The survey included informed consent, confidentiality statements, and standardised instructions. Responses were screened, cleaned, and exported for analysis. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 experts (two from each university), conducted online or face-to-face. Because some experts were unwilling to be audio-recorded, detailed notes were taken during the interviews. These notes were subsequently organized and used for follow-up confirmation to improve interpretive accuracy. With consent, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and used to interpret and corroborate quantitative results; follow-up interviews were conducted after preliminary survey analysis to confirm interpretations.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS 27 and AMOS. Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were used for preliminary screening and relationship inspection. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) tested direct effects (H1–H4), mediation paths of CDMSE (H5–H7), and the moderating role of gender (H8), using standard goodness-of-fit indices (e.g., CMIN/DF, GFI, CFI, TLI, RMSEA). Qualitative interview transcripts were analysed thematically (supported by iFLYTEK) to identify recurrent themes and provide explanatory depth, with findings integrated through triangulation to enhance credibility.

Research Results

1. Measurement Quality and Preliminary Relationships

The first set of findings focuses on the quality of the measurement model and the overall descriptive and correlational patterns among key variables. This analysis included 409 valid questionnaires from graduating students majoring in teacher education, of whom 66.26% were female. The sample was distributed relatively evenly across six universities to ensure representativeness within the context of teacher education in Guangxi.

1.1 Reliability and Validity

The overall internal consistency of the instrument was excellent (Cronbach's α = 0.925). All five constructs exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold, confirming strong reliability.

Table 1 Reliability of Core Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's α
Career-Related Parent Support (CRPS)	0.867
Peer Influence (PI)	0.881
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	0.866
Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE)	0.877
Career Expectations (CE)	0.901

Validity testing further confirmed measurement adequacy. The KMO value reached 0.930, indicating excellent sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's test was significant ($p < .001$), supporting factorability. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) demonstrated strong model fit (χ^2/df = 1.214; CFI = 0.990; TLI = 0.988; RMSEA = 0.023). All standardized factor loadings exceeded 0.70, and composite reliability (CR = 0.868–0.902) and average variance extracted (AVE = 0.568–0.649) met recommended criteria. Discriminant validity was also supported, as the square roots of AVE were higher than inter-construct correlations.

1.2 Descriptive and Correlational Patterns

Descriptive statistics showed moderate to high consistency among the constructs. Career expectations had the highest overall mean (M = 3.56), followed by career-related parental support (M = 3.45), peer influence (M = 3.44), emotional intelligence (M = 3.31), and career development self-efficacy (M = 3.26). This indicates that students generally held positive career

prospects but had relatively low confidence in decision-making. Pearson correlation analysis showed significant positive correlations among all variables ($p < .01$).

Table 2 Key Correlations

Variables	CRPS	PI	EI	CDMSE	CE
CRPS	—	.372**	.415**	.434**	.468**
PI		—	.365**	.362**	.417**
EI			—	.415**	.464**
CDMSE				—	.404**

All correlations ranged from .362 to .468, indicating moderate but meaningful associations without multicollinearity concerns. Notably, CRPS showed the strongest correlation with Career Expectations ($r = .468$), while CDMSE was moderately correlated with CE ($r = .404$), providing preliminary support for its mediating role.

Overall, the measurement model demonstrated strong psychometric properties, and the correlation structure provided empirical justification for proceeding with structural equation modeling to test mediation and moderation effects.

2. Qualitative Thematic Insights

The second major finding derives from the qualitative phase, which aimed to contextualize and validate the quantitative results through thematic analysis. Semi-structured online interviews were conducted with 12 experts from the six participating universities. Due to cultural sensitivities in Chinese academic settings, most participants declined audio recording; therefore, detailed real-time notes were taken. To enrich the data and enhance rapport, a follow-up open-ended "Refreshing Report" was collected via email. This two-stage approach strengthened credibility and allowed participants to elaborate more freely on their perspectives.

A triangulated analytic strategy was adopted. Interview notes were first processed using iFLYTEK AI-assisted transcription to enhance accuracy. The cleaned data were then imported into MAXQDA 2020 for thematic coding. Word frequency analysis and word cloud visualization were used to identify dominant themes, followed by manual refinement to ensure interpretive validity.



Figure 2 MAXQDA Thematic Word Cloud of Interview Data

The word cloud shown in Figure 2 presents the most frequently appearing terms in the dataset in a visual form. The size of each word reflects how often it appears and how important it is within the data. The main keywords closely match the core variables examined in the structural model. This visual result also helps explain how the topics are distributed based on the keyword analysis.

Table 3 Keyword Classification by Research Variables

Variable	Representative Keywords	Frequency Example (%)
Career-Related Parental Support	parental, parents, support	up to 0.99%
Peer Influence	peer, influences	~0.46%
Emotional Intelligence	emotional, understanding, effectiveness	~0.43%
CDMSE	decision-making, self-efficacy, confidence	up to 1.77%
Gender	gender	0.60%
Career Expectations	expectations, aspirations	1.10%

The most significant qualitative topic was self-efficacy in making decisions regarding one's career, with decision-making having the highest number of keywords (18.77 percent). Many professionals have made the observation that the degree to which students are self-assured in their ability to evaluate their own teaching abilities and to triumph over professional challenges has a significant bearing on their future goals. The fact that CDMSE is a major mediator is supported by this qualitative emphasis, which validates the quantitative finding.

Parental support emerged as another salient theme. Experts noted that family support, financial assistance, and job-related conversations influence rural students' choices about entering the teaching profession. Peer influence was discussed as both support and pressure, affecting students' career rankings and perceived alternatives. Emotional intelligence was linked to the ability to persevere through internships and the uncertainty that comes with job transitions. Experts believe that pupils who are emotionally capable are more persistent and clear when it comes to their professional preparation. Experts finally brought up the topic of gender. In order to validate the statistically significant moderating impact of the quantitative analysis, male and female students reported different levels of confidence and expectations.

3. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Comparing quantitative and qualitative findings shows strong consistency across approaches, boosting the suggested model's explanatory ability. The two lines of data agree that career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE) shapes students' career expectations.

Statistics showed that career-related parental support predicted CDMSE. Interviews confirmed this relationship. Experts have observed that students who receive open communication, emotional support, and practical guidance from parents are more confident when considering teaching jobs and career paths. Parental affirmation is a "psychological anchor" that stabilizes students during uncertainty, according to some participants. Qualitative narratives describe how support becomes confidence, adding interpretive dimension to the statistical coefficient.

Similar convergence occurred in peer influence. Peer impact improves CDMSE, according to quantitative research. Interviewees said peers are knowledge sources and emotional reference groups. Students compare internships, contracts, and professional development options with peers. Comparisons seem to normalize career anxieties and boost confidence. Thus, lived collaborative reinforcement supports the statistical impact.

In the structural model, emotional intelligence also improved CDMSE. Qualitative findings showed that emotionally self-aware students make professional selections more calmly and strategically. Participants said emotionally resilient students may handle setbacks better, especially during teaching internships. Emotional stability improves career planning and decision-making.

The strongest quantitative path was from CDMSE to career expectations. Interviews reinforced this finding. Students who reported greater decisional confidence were consistently described as setting more ambitious goals and maintaining clearer professional visions. In other words, self-efficacy appears to transform abstract aspirations into concrete expectations.

The mediation results were likewise mirrored qualitatively. Parental support, peer influence, and emotional intelligence were not described as directly inflating expectations; rather, they were portrayed as building confidence first, which then elevated aspirations. This layered process closely matches the statistical mediation pathways.

Finally, the moderating effect of gender found quantitative support and received nuanced explanation in interviews. Experts observed that social expectations and confidence expression vary by gender, influencing how strongly self–efficacy translates into career expectations.

4. Validation of the Research Findings

After integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the conceptual framework was constructed validated to assure its reliability. Methodological triangulation and expert review were used for this validation. Experts received a "Refreshing Report" together with interview transcripts and theme coding outputs. The paper summarised the modified model, major statistical data, and qualitative interpretations, allowing experts to review and comment. This iterative process improved confirmability and reduced interpretative bias. Delphi–informed evaluations with specialists from five institutions followed. Using a Likert scale with five points, the appropriateness of the model was evaluated, which included theoretical alignment and conceptual clarity; practicality; practical application; and usefulness; which included practical contribution and broader relevance. The scale ranged from one to five, with one representing strong disagreement and five representing strong agreement. For the purpose of assessing the level of consensus, mean scores and standard deviations were calculated. Table 4 presents the overall evaluation results across the three dimensions.

Table 4 Expert Evaluation Results of the Conceptual Framework (N = 10)

Dimension	Mean Score Range	Standard Deviation Range	Interpretation
Propriety	4.17–5.00	0.00–0.55	Strong theoretical alignment
Feasibility	4.17–4.83	0.41–0.55	Operationally practical
Utility	4.17–4.83	0.41–0.55	High applied value

As shown in Table 4, all mean scores exceeded 4.0, indicating strong expert agreement regarding the model's theoretical relevance, operational feasibility, and applied usefulness. Standard deviations remained relatively low, suggesting stable consensus across evaluators.

A closer examination of individual items revealed particularly strong endorsement in several areas. Within the Propriety dimension, the item evaluating whether the model comprehensively incorporates key influencing factors received a perfect mean score (M = 5.00, SD = 0.00), demonstrating unanimous agreement. In the Feasibility domain, the methodological design appropriateness item achieved a high mean (M = 4.83), indicating expert confidence in the model's executability within real institutional contexts. Similarly, within the Utility dimension, the item assessing the model's contribution to solving practical problems obtained one of the highest ratings (M = 4.83), confirming its applied relevance.

Although a few items received comparatively lower—but still strong—means (around 4.17), these scores primarily reflected suggestions for refining clarity of articulation and improving contextual flexibility rather than substantive disagreement with the framework.

Overall, the validation results demonstrate that the conceptual model possesses strong content validity, structural coherence, and practical applicability. By integrating reflective qualitative review with structured quantitative expert scoring, this validation process reinforces the methodological rigor and empirical robustness of the study's conclusions.

Discussion

This study shows that senior students at Guangxi normal universities use career decision-making self-efficacy (CDMSE) to link contextual supports and personal capabilities to career expectations (CE). Self-efficacy was the strongest direct predictor of career outcomes, supporting Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). A strong CDMSE-to-CE path indicates that students with confidence in their career decision-making abilities maintain greater career ambitions despite regional job limits.

Prior research has shown that contextual supports facilitate self-efficacy growth (Turner et al., 2009). Career-related parental support (CRPS) and peer influence (PI) significantly affect CDMSE. Chinese parents frequently provide knowledge and assistance in addition to emotional support. Qualitative narratives calling parents a "backbone" or "long-term investment" support this. This study shows that perceived supportive engagement boosts choice confidence, suggesting a resource-oriented dynamic in this group, contrasting other research that views parental influence as pressing.

The overall impact of peer influence supported social learning hypotheses that vicarious experience and information exchange boost efficacy views. Qualitative research showed ambivalence: peers can cause comparison anxiety. This subtlety differs from linear peer support interpretations in prior models, emphasizing controlled peer settings over unregulated comparison cultures.

Furthermore, emotional intelligence (EI) was found to be a significant predictor of CDMSE, which is consistent with previous research showing that emotional regulation supports adaptive career behavior (Garg & Rastogi, 2009). Emotional intelligence helps to alleviate tension and enhance communication during high-pressure job searches, which in turn helps to maintain expectations. This finding expands SCCT by explicitly treating emotional competence as an important personal resource that supports career decision confidence.

The gender moderation effects provide support for gender socialization ideas (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). These effects demonstrate that environmental and emotional factors may have a bigger impact on female students. Based on this, it appears that individualized support programs may be of greater use to women than a one-size-fits-all approach. More broadly, these findings may be particularly meaningful for normal university students, whose future work often involves teaching-related emotional labor and sustained interpersonal engagement.

Generally speaking, the interpretation is strengthened by the convergence of quantitative and qualitative approaches: social support and emotional competence are factors that improve CDMSE, which in turn has an effect on professional goals. Inconsistencies of a minor type, particularly with regard to the dual nature of peer influence, make it possible to improve the model without compromising its general coherence.

New Knowledge from Research

This study advances career development research by empirically integrating contextual supports, emotional intelligence, and gender moderation into a CDMSE-centered framework within a regional Chinese university context. It demonstrates that CDMSE operates as a mediating psychological engine translating family, peer, and emotional resources into elevated career expectations. The inclusion of EI expands traditional SCCT applications beyond environmental supports, while gender moderation clarifies differential sensitivity to social-context factors (Table 5).

Table 5 Summary of New Knowledge Contributions

Contribution Area	Innovation
Theoretical	Extends SCCT by integrating emotional intelligence as a core antecedent of CDMSE
Contextual	Provides empirical evidence from Guangxi normal universities
Mechanistic	Confirms CDMSE as central mediator linking support and expectations
Gender Perspective	Identifies moderated strength of effects across genders

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that career decision–making self–efficacy is the central mechanism shaping senior students' career expectations in Guangxi normal universities. Career–related parental support, peer influence, and emotional intelligence all significantly enhance CDMSE, which in turn strongly predicts career expectations. The findings confirm the explanatory power of efficacy–centered career models in regional higher education contexts.

Parental support functions as a multidimensional resource encompassing emotional reassurance and informational guidance. Peer networks contribute positively but require structured guidance to avoid harmful comparison dynamics. Emotional intelligence strengthens decision confidence by regulating stress and improving interpersonal performance. Gender differences indicate that supportive and emotional resources may produce amplified benefits for female students.

By integrating quantitative modeling, qualitative interpretation, and expert validation, this study provides a coherent and context–sensitive explanation of how social and personal factors shape career expectations. The evidence underscores that strengthening students' confidence in career decision–making is essential for sustaining realistic yet ambitious career aspirations during the university–to–work transition. The broader theoretical implication is that in economically changing regional contexts, students' career resilience depends not only on external opportunities, but also on the psychological resources and support systems that help them interpret and act on those opportunities.

Suggestions

1. General Suggestions

Based on the findings, normal universities should reposition career guidance around the enhancement of career decision–making self–efficacy (CDMSE), as it is the strongest proximal predictor of career expectations. First, institutions should design structured, practice–oriented

career modules that systematically train students in self–assessment, labor–market exploration, goal clarification, and decision problem–solving. Rather than offering fragmented lectures, universities can establish staged guidance pathways in the senior year, linking career planning, internship preparation, resume development, and interview simulations into a coherent progression. Second, emotional intelligence training should be embedded within career services. Workshops on stress regulation, communication skills, and reflective coping strategies can help students manage uncertainty and maintain confidence during the job–search process. Third, universities should construct positive peer environments through supervised mentoring systems, alumni–sharing platforms, and collaborative career projects, thereby transforming peer influence into a supportive rather than competitive force. Fourth, family engagement initiatives—such as online parent seminars—should promote autonomy–supportive communication, encouraging parents to provide emotional and informational support without excessive pressure. Finally, gender–responsive career education should address stereotype constraints and ensure equal access to internships and leadership opportunities, particularly supporting groups that report lower CDMSE.

2. Further Research Suggestions

Future studies would benefit from longitudinal designs that follow students beyond graduation to observe whether self–efficacy continues to shape career adjustment in early employment stages. Cross–regional comparisons could also clarify whether the observed structural relationships are specific to Guangxi or generalizable to other provinces with different labor market conditions.

In addition, incorporating multi–source data—such as parental reports, advisor assessments, or behavioral indicators of career exploration—could reduce reliance on self–report measures. Further differentiation of peer influence into supportive and pressure–oriented components may also provide a more refined understanding of its dual effects. Future research may also examine actual employment outcomes to determine whether stronger career expectations and higher CDMSE are translated into successful job placement or career adjustment after graduation.

Experimental or intervention–based research examining programs designed to enhance CDMSE would offer stronger causal evidence and contribute to more targeted career guidance strategies.

References

Betz, N. E., & Fitzgerald, L. F. (1987). *The career psychology of women*. New York: Academic Press.

Garg, P., & Rastogi, R. (2009). Effect of psychological wellbeing on organizational commitment of employees. *The IUP Journal of Organizational Behavior, 8*(2), 42–51.

Gianakos, I. (1999). Patterns of career choice and career decision–making self–efficacy. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 54*(2), 244–258. https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1998.1668

Jiang, Z. (2016). Emotional intelligence and career decision–making self–efficacy: Mediating goal and professional commitment roles. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 53*(1), 25–39. https://doi.org/10.1002/joec.12026

Kashif, M. F., Shaheen, F., & Amjad, W. (2021). Effect of peer attachment on career decision making among undergraduate students. *Global Educational Studies Review, VI*(I), 184–192. https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2021(VI–I).19

Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45*(1), 79–122. https://doi:10.1006/jvbe.1994.1027

Metheny, J., & McWhirter, E. H. (2013). Contributions of social status and family support to college students' career decision self–efficacy and outcome expectations. *Journal of Career Assessment, 21*(3), 378–394. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072712475164

Metz, A. J., Fouad, N. A., & Ihle–Helledy, K. (2009). Career aspirations and expectations of college students: Demographic and labor market comparisons. *Journal of Career Assessment, 17*(2), 155–171. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072708328862

Odacı, H., Çıkrıkçı, N., & Degerli, F. I. (2022). The role of problem–solving skills in career decision–making, self–efficacy, and vocational outcome expectations. *International Journal of Educational Reform, 32*(4), 450–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/10567879221076084

Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 9*(3), 185–211. https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG–P24E–52WK–6CDG

Taylor, K. M., & Betz, N. E. (1983). Applications of self–efficacy theory to the understanding and treatment of career indecision. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 22*(1), 63–81. https://doi.org/10.1016/0001–8791(83)90006–4

Turner, S. L., Alliman-Brissett, A. E., Lapan, R. T., Udipi, S., & Ergun, D. (2003). The career-related parent support scale. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development, 36*(2), 83-94. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481756.2003.12069084