

Employment Intention and its Influencing Factors among Preschool Education Students in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract

Preschool education students at higher vocational colleges will be the new generation of early childhood teachers. However, the willingness of young people to engage in preschool-related work after graduation is likely due to a combination of personal, experience-based, family and institutional factors. Examine the employment intention of preschool education students in higher vocational colleges and determine the reasons for their career choices in this paper. A quantitative survey research design was used to collect questionnaire data from 1,699 students of preschool education. Research has explored various aspects of students' employment intention, career aspirations, values and cognitions about work life, experience in internships, family support, work stress, school support needs, etc. Based on the above research results, students' employment intentions are not uniform, and the reasons for choosing a career vary among different groups. The reasons students want to work include: career beliefs, expectations for life after school, internship experiences, family support, economic needs, pressure from school, etc. Job stability, income level, welfare benefits, work stress and prospects for future study were all relatively high-priority issues. Based on the above analysis, it is proposed that higher vocational colleges strengthen career cognition education, improve the quality of internships, provide more realistic employment information, and enhance career guidance services. The above results provide practical support for improving talent development and internship arrangements in preschool education.

Keywords: Employment Intention, Preschool Education Students, Higher Vocational Colleges, Career Cognition, Career Guidance

Introduction

Early childhood education plays a fundamental role in children's cognitive, social, emotional, and long-term learning development. The quality of early childhood education is closely related to the preparation, stability, and professional commitment of preschool teachers. Internationally, early childhood education and care has increasingly emphasized process quality, curriculum and pedagogy, and workforce development, highlighting the importance of a stable and well-prepared early childhood education workforce (OECD, 2021). In China,

the development of high-quality preschool education also depends on curriculum quality, teacher quality, institutional support, and equitable access to quality early childhood education (Huang & Xiong, 2021; Rao et al., 2023). Therefore, students majoring in preschool education in higher vocational colleges are potential future members of the preschool teacher workforce, and their employment intention is closely related to the sustainable development of early childhood education.

However, completing a preschool education programme does not necessarily mean that students will choose preschool teaching as their future career. Some students will go to kindergartens and other early childhood education institutions after graduating from school, while others will work in other fields or continue their studies. Liu et al. (2023) found that the choices of major and career for preschool education undergraduates in China were influenced by their own interests, family expectations, gender stereotypes, feelings about job stability and aspirations for personal growth. Research on Chinese higher vocational students has also shown that their career decisions are affected by career adaptability, educational identity, career values, career decision-making self-efficacy and career goals (Wang et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2023). The above studies believe that students' work intention is a broad career-choice system, rather than just a selection of work.

Students' will to work is also connected with their career perception, internship experiences, family views and institutional support. Teaching internships offer students a chance to experience actual educational life and learn what is required of early childhood educators. Cai and others (2022) found that teaching internships positively affect the sense of professional identity, self-efficacy and motivation to learn for novice teachers. Chen and others (2023) have also shown that the professional identity of Chinese pre-service preschool teachers changes over time, indicating that students' sense of professionalism and commitment are also developmental rather than fixed. Based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, motivation and other career outcomes for employees depend on the relative strength of job demands and job resources (Bakker et al., 2023). Therefore, all of the above factors will likely impact how willing students are to enter the field of preschool education.

However, there has been little research on preschool education students at higher vocational colleges, especially in terms of an all-encompassing view that includes career cognition, employment values, internship experience, family support, employment pressure and school support simultaneously. Existing studies have provided some references for teacher retention, professional identity, internship experience and career decision-making; however, fewer studies have explored how these factors relate to the employment intention of higher vocational preschool education students. Based on the questionnaire data collected from students at the college for higher vocational preschool education, this paper will explore their intentions to find work and identify the main reasons for their career choices. This study will investigate the factors that affect the employment decisions of preschool education students at higher vocational colleges through career cognition, values of work, internship experiences, family support, employment pressure, and school support, and provide corresponding policy recommendations for improving the cultivation of preschool education talents, optimizing internship arrangements, and strengthening career guidance services.

Literature Review

Employment Intention of Preschool Education Students

Employment intention is the degree to which students wish to choose a specific type of work or employment after graduation. It shows whether the preschool education students are willing to go to kindergarten and other early childhood education institutions, and whether they see preschool education as a possible career path in the future. It is necessary to know why young children's parents or guardians plan to hire their children for preschool education in the future.

Employment intention should not be regarded as whether students want to be preschool teachers. It also involves career preferences, expected employment sectors, expectations regarding employment stability, and willingness to remain in the profession. Previous studies have shown that teachers' career decisions are closely related to job satisfaction, burnout, working conditions, and professional well-being (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Toropova et al., 2021). For higher vocational students, employment intention may be particularly practical and outcome-oriented because they are usually closer to labour-market transition. Research has also shown that career adaptability, educational identity, career values, career decision-making self-efficacy, and employability perceptions are related to students' career decisions (Ergün & Şeşen, 2021; Wang et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025). Therefore, employment intention was examined in this study as the central outcome variable for understanding the career choices of preschool education students in higher vocational colleges.

Career Cognition and Employment Values

Career cognition refers to students' understanding and evaluation of a profession, including occupational value, social status, employment content, career prospects, and professional development opportunities. Employment values refer to the criteria students use when evaluating future employment positions, such as salary, employment stability, welfare benefits, work pressure, career advancement, and work-life balance. For preschool education students in higher vocational colleges, these two factors are important because their career choices are often closely connected to real employment conditions.

Based on the Job Demands-Resources theory, people's motivation, health and other lives, and working life are all affected by their sense of whether their job has high demands or ample resources (Bakker et al., 2023). Perceived job demands in preschool education may include work volume, emotional labour, communication pressure and restricted salary development prospects, and job resources may encompass social worth, professional support, job stability, and growth opportunities. Studies on Chinese preschool teachers have also shown that income and work-life balance issues are related to their intention to leave, and thus, economic and work-related factors may reduce the appeal of a career in preschool education (Li and others, 2021).

According to research on professional identity, students acquire an understanding of the teaching profession through learning and practice. Chen et al. (2023) found that the professional identity of Chinese pre-service preschool teachers is dynamic over time; Zhao and Li (2025) have also shown that work volition and major satisfaction are correlated with the extent to which work and one's major align for Chinese pre-service preschool teachers.

Therefore, career cognition and employment values were added to this study as necessary individual and evaluative factors affecting students' intention to work.

Internship Experience and Employment Intention

An important link in the training system for young children is practical application; therefore, internships have been added to the course curriculum to allow students to experience the life of preschool workers firsthand. Internships enable students to observe children in real life, participate in educational activities, communicate with teachers and parents, and learn various practical skills such as observing behaviour, organizing activities, managing the classroom, etc.

Previous studies have shown that teaching internships are to help new teachers improve professionally. Cai and others (2022) have found that teaching internships are positively related to the sense of professional identity, self-efficacy and learning motivation of pre-service teachers. Recently, some studies have also pointed out that mentor support and the emotional experience of interns at preschools may affect their sense of professional identity and future career choices as pre-service preschool teachers (Zhang and others, 2025).

However, internship experience can have multiple effects on the will to work. Positive internship experiences can increase students' self-confidence and motivation for the work of early childhood education, while negative experiences may result in work pressure, emotional stress, low recognition and restricted growth opportunities. Therefore, internship experience was also included in this study as a necessary factor in the experience that may affect students' wish to work.

Family Support and Employment Pressure

Support from the family is one of the circumstances in life that affect students' choice of career. It includes the parents' attitude towards the child's choice of study, emotional support, advice, expectations and financial or information support. Family members' views on preschool education may affect whether preschool students feel confident about choosing jobs related to preschools. Koçak et al. (2021) found that family influence and support were positively correlated with students' career decision-making self-efficacy and happiness; thus, family support can help build students' confidence and psychological readiness for career decisions.

The other is the pressure to have a job while studying. Higher vocational students may face employment pressure due to competition for academic qualifications, higher salary expectations, uncertainty in the labour market, family and social expectations, etc. Preschool students are also under high pressure from work, emotionally strained, have few opportunities for advancement, and their salaries are relatively low. Li and others (2021) studied the intention to leave for preschool teachers and found that income, work-life balance and organisation commitment were positively correlated with their desire to remain. Therefore, employment intention is the result of a person's desire and external pressure. Students are aware of the benefits of preschool education, but their final choice of life path may still be influenced by family wishes and employment conditions. Therefore, this study will examine family support and employment pressure as the context and constraints of students' employment intention.

School Support and Career Guidance

Support from the school is also an outside force that can affect students' desire to learn and their choices in life. School support for students in higher vocational colleges includes career planning education, employment information, internship placement, employment recommendations, interview training, resume guidance, salary negotiation guidance and counselling services. The above types of support will help students learn about the labour market, discover their future work and build the willingness to be employed.

Preschool education students need to know about job opportunities because these jobs will shape their professional values and life paths; therefore, their career counseling should consider all this. If higher vocational colleges can provide more detailed information about the career paths, salaries, qualification requirements and development opportunities for preschool teachers, students will have a clearer idea of what kind of job they wish to have after graduation. On the other hand, without career guidance, the students will be left to choose based on limited information or their families' wishes.

The employment prospects of the students' university life have also changed because of shifts in society (Ergün & Şeşen, 2021). Wang et al. (2023) have also proposed that the quality of career decision-making for students in Chinese higher vocational colleges can be improved by cultivating career values, self-efficacy in career decision-making, and goals for one's career. Therefore, school support was selected as the institutional factor to be examined in this study on students' employment preparation and career decisions.

Problem Statement

Stable Development of early childhood education is based on the supply of qualified preschool teachers. As an important source of future preschool teachers, students majoring in preschool education at higher vocational colleges are expected to work in kindergartens and other early childhood education institutions after graduation. Professional training does not guarantee a stable desire for work, however. Some students are reluctant to pursue preschool education for the future due to worries about low salaries, a large workload, unstable employment, poor career prospects and job security. Therefore, the professional preparation may not be in line with the chosen job. If the students' employment intention is still unstable, then the training function of the higher vocational preschool education programme will not be fully transformed into workforce supply for the early childhood education sector.

Previous studies have investigated teacher career choice, professional identity, internship experience, job satisfaction, burnout and teacher retention; however, most of this research has focused on undergraduate pre-service teachers, in-service teachers or the development of professional identity. Relatively little attention has been paid to the employment intention of preschool education students in higher vocational colleges from an all-encompassing perspective. In particular, the collective influence of salary expectations, career cognition, internship experience, family support, employment pressure and school support on students' career choices has been studied relatively little. Therefore, this paper intends to examine the employment intention of preschool education students at higher vocational colleges and identify the main reasons for their career choices.

Research Objectives

Investigate the employment intentions of preschool education students at higher vocational colleges and identify the main reasons for their career choices in this paper.

1. To explore the present situation and main features of employment intention among preschool education students in higher vocational colleges.
2. The following are typical reasons why students have a desire to work: career cognition, values for work, internship experiences, family support, employment pressure, and school support.

To propose practical suggestions for improving career guidance, internship design and talent cultivation in preschool education programs.

Research Questions

The problems to be studied are as follows:

1. What are the main features of employment intention for preschool education students in higher vocational colleges?
2. What are the main reasons for the employment intention of preschool education students in higher vocational colleges?

How to help high-level vocational colleges better align their career guidance, internship arrangements and professional training with the demands of employment for their students.

Theoretical Framework

The two theoretical frameworks for this paper are Social Cognitive Career Theory and experiential learning. The two are used to study why students of higher vocational colleges want to work after attending preschool education. Social Cognitive Career Theory attributes the reasons for choosing a career to individual beliefs, social and environmental supports, expected outcomes, etc., and the experiential learning theory believes that learning by doing helps students understand work better and decide on a career path.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory proposes that people's choices in life after school are the result of their own attributes, their environment, and their expectations for the outcomes of their choices (Lent, 1994). The factors of individuals in this study include students' career cognition, professional recognition and employment values. The three are family support, school support and the internship environment. Outcome expectations refer to the students' expectations of salary, job stability, welfare benefits, workload, career development prospects and social recognition.

This theory is also applicable to the choices of employment for students at higher vocational preschools, as they are not solely motivated by personal interest. Students can also consider whether preschool education will offer a relatively stable job, a reasonable salary, good work-life balance and sufficient promotion opportunities. At the same time, these choices may be affected by family attitudes, school career guidance, internship experience and labour market perceptions. Therefore, Social Cognitive Career Theory can help explain why employment intention should be examined as a result of multiple interacting factors rather than as a single wish of one's own.

Experiential Learning Perspective

Explain how the internship experience motivates students to seek work through experiential learning. Kolb (1984) proposed that the cycle of learning is: experience - reflection - conceptualisation - action. Internships for preschool education students are a type of experience learning that can expose them to the actual environment of kindergartens and help them form a more realistic perception of the work carried out by preschool teachers.

Internship experience will affect people's will to work in various ways. A good internship can help students become more confident and interested in early childhood education. On the other hand, a negative internship experience may expose students to heavy work, emotional labour, a low salary and career pressure, thus decreasing their motivation to work in preschool education. Therefore, the experience learning model can be used to incorporate internship experience in this study.

Conceptual Framework

Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory and the experience learning perspective, this study puts forward a multi-factor conceptual framework to examine employment intention among preschool education students at higher vocational colleges.

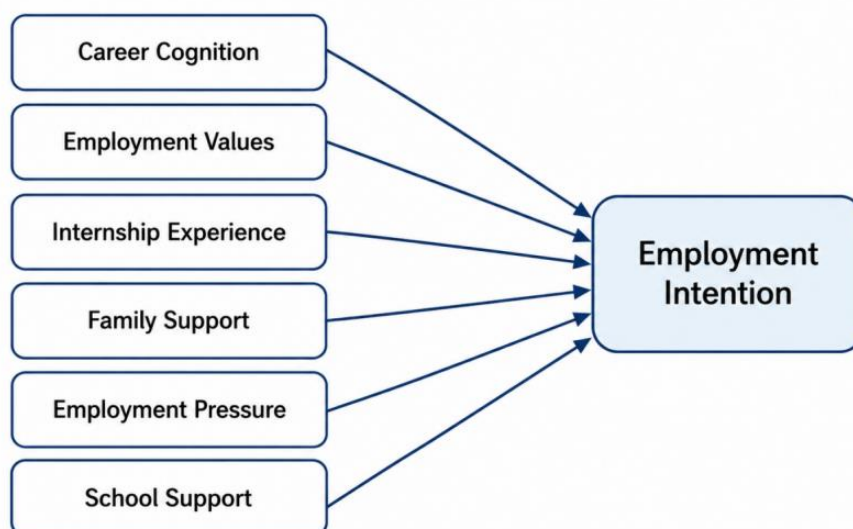


Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the study

As shown in Figure 1, employment intention is taken as the dependent variable, and career cognition, employment values, internship experience, family support, employment pressure and school support are all regarded as the main independent variables. This framework is based on the many reasons why students wish to work and is consistent with the items in this study's questionnaire. Instead of considering only one cause, the framework shows that a student's intention to work is influenced by their own thoughts and feelings, expectations of employment, previous experiences, family life, how stressed they feel at work, and the support available from schools.

Methodology

Research Design

The Research Design of this paper is quantitative survey research. This paper will investigate the employment intention of students majoring in preschool education at higher vocational colleges and determine the basic reasons for this choice. A questionnaire survey was selected as the research method to collect data from a large number of students systematically and study their preferences for employment, values of work, career cognition, internship experiences, family support, employment pressure and needs for school support.

This study aimed to describe and explore. It did not want to examine a difficult causal model. It is no longer necessary to display how many students wish to work and why they want to do so at present.

Participants and Sampling

The participants were students of the major of preschool education at a higher vocational college. As the subject of the study was only students of preschool education, the first type of sampling employed was purposive sampling to select the subjects for this research. At the same time, convenient sampling was used to distribute the questionnaire online to students who were convenient and willing to participate in the survey.

A total of 1,699 valid questionnaires were distributed. Among the respondents, 1,065 were in the second year, accounting for 62.68 per cent of the sample, and 634 were in the third year, accounting for 37.32 per cent. Among the respondents, 71 were men at a rate of 4.18%, and 1,628 were women at a rate of 95.82%. The places of origin for the students are as follows: 204 were in municipalities or provincial capitals (12.01%); 143 were in ordinary prefecture-level cities (8.42%); 379 were in counties (22.31%); 252 were in townships (14.83%); and 721 were in rural areas (42.44%).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Grade	Second year	1,065	62.68%
	Third year	634	37.32%
Gender	Male	71	4.18%
	Female	1,628	95.82%
Place of origin	Municipality or provincial capital	204	12.01%
	Prefecture-level city	143	8.42%
	County	379	22.31%
	Township	252	14.83%
	Rural area	721	42.44%

Note. The total number of valid questionnaire responses was 1,699.

Some parts of the questionnaire were answered based on a person's real experience or other reasons, so the number of valid answers in these parts was not the same. For example, there were 376 valid questionnaires in the section on internships. Therefore, the entire sample was used for the general demographic and employment intention analysis, and section-specific valid questionnaire responses were employed in the analysis of internship experience, family support, employment pressure and school support.

Instrument

Data were obtained by the self-developed standardised questionnaire. Based on the purpose of this study, some research questions were set, relevant literature on employment intention and career decision-making was collected, and the practical characteristics of students majoring in preschool education at higher vocational colleges were investigated to design a questionnaire. Collect data on the students' desire to work and other reasons for choosing a career in a questionnaire.

Several parts were included in the questionnaire. The first part is to collect general information about the participants, such as their grades, genders, places of residence, parents' jobs and education, etc. The second part focused on employment intention and career choice, including the direction of work students wished to pursue, preferred sector for work, maximum acceptable wait time before employment, salary expectations, and willingness to take on preschool-related employment.

The third section is about the reasons for working and living, such as stability of employment, income, welfare services, work pressure, opportunities for career advancement, the work environment, etc. The fourth section is career cognition and professional awareness; it includes what students know about preschool education, how conscious they are of the professional value of preschool teachers, their sense of occupation, and what they hope to achieve in their careers.

The fifth is about family support and expectations; specifically, parents' emotions towards their children's kindergarten jobs, the kind of work they wish for their children, the desire for job stability, and the influence of family opinions on their children's career decisions. The sixth part was on the internship experience, covering the time of internship, location of internship, tasks in internship, benefits from internship, satisfaction with internship, and perceived importance of internship experience in career selection. The seventh part listed the support and career guidance requirements for the school, such as employment information, internship recommendations, training in employment skills, salary communication guidance, and career planning consultations.

Scale Format

The content of the items in different parts of the questionnaire varied. Most of the basic demographic information and employment preference items were collected by single-choice questions. Some of the options in the multiple-choice questions included the tasks at the internship, the gains obtained, the demand for employment assistance, and worries about employment.

Several items of career cognition, family support, employment pressure and school support were rated on a 5-point scale. The level of agreement, perception or importance for a number between 1 and 5 was requested from the respondents. Some of the items in the ranking questions also sought to determine the relative weights of all sorts of employment-related factors, such as wages, stability of employment, welfare benefits, work pressure, career growth opportunities, etc.

The combination of these question types was suitable for describing both the general employment wishes of students and their perceptions of all sorts of reasons for a desire to work.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed online to students of higher vocational colleges majoring in preschool education. Voluntary participation, and participants were informed that the data would only be used for academic research. No individuals' identifying information were included in the questionnaire, and all responses were anonymous.

Collect the data and verify whether any have been missed or altered. A total of 1,699 valid questionnaires were distributed and collected. Questions that were answered by all respondents did not need to be included. Only those that were actually answered by the respondents in this section for items requiring a conditional response, such as internship-related content, were included in the analysis.

Reliability and Validity

As a self-developed questionnaire, content validity has been assured at the design stage of the questionnaire. The research goals, related studies, and actual employment problems of students majoring in preschool education at higher vocational colleges served as the foundation for developing the questionnaire items. The sections of the questionnaire include the following main factors for students' employment intention: employment desire, values related to employment, career outlook, experience with internships, family support, work stress and school support.

Before the official study, the content of the questionnaire was modified to meet the requirements of the research and was easier for the subjects to understand.

Data Analysis

The primary data for this study are the original questionnaires; a supporting report was also automatically generated to list frequencies, percentages, means and rankings. Therefore, the general trend of students' willingness to work and the reasons behind this have been observed.

Frequency distribution and proportion of students' current employment intention, as well as mean scores and weighted rankings, were used to describe their characteristics. The above statistics were used to describe the students' preferred places of employment, desired salaries, acceptable waiting periods for work, favoured types of employment, career views, internship experiences, family support, work pressure and school support needs.

Multiple-choice questions and ranking questions were used to determine which factors among many were most frequently selected or given high importance by students in their career choices. The average scores of students' sense of career cognition, family support, employment pressure and school support were used for summary statistics. Since this study did not aim to conduct a comprehensive survey and did not test in-depth causal models, the results are only to be regarded as descriptive patterns, response distributions, mean scores and relative weights of different factors.

Based on the above analysis, this study sought to determine whether students majoring in preschool education at higher vocational colleges are eager to work and what factors affect their decision to pursue a career.

Results and Discussion

Employment Intention and Career Preferences

According to the above survey, the desire to work among students of preschool education at higher vocational colleges is not strong. Although the respondents were majoring in preschool education, they did not intend to work as kindergarten teachers in the future. As shown in Table 2, 76.34 per cent of the respondents selected the type of kindergarten as their first-choice place of work, including public kindergartens, inclusive private kindergartens and high-end private kindergartens. However, 12.18% of the people listed non-education sectors as their first choice, 4.53% listed entrepreneurship, and 4.18% listed temporary non-employment. The above data do not show that professional training will automatically lead to an increase in the desire to work in preschool education.

Table 2

Preferred Nature of Employment Institution

Preferred nature of employment institution	Frequency	Percentage
Nature of kindergarten	1,297	76.34%
Early education or childcare institutions	47	2.77%
Non-education sectors	207	12.18%
Entrepreneurship	77	4.53%
Temporary non-employment	71	4.18%
Total	1,699	100.00%

Note. "Nature of kindergarten" includes public kindergartens, inclusive private kindergartens, and high-end private kindergartens. Early education or childcare institutions include early education institutions and childcare centres.

Based on the above data, the students' choices of employment are closely related to their actual career plans. Many students' choices for work in early childhood education were not based on a genuine interest in the profession but rather on factors such as higher pay, more stable jobs, good benefits and welfare, low work stress, etc. Therefore, students' employment intention should be seen as an all-encompassing and varied choice that is affected by both professional education and the work environment.

Employment Values and Career Expectations

Based on the above data, the students' main concern is work-related conditions. Among the reasons people seek employment, stability in work, a relatively high income, good welfare benefits, reasonable work-life balance, and future career prospects are all desired. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students' values for employment are practical.

Based on the questionnaire, most of the respondents come from relatively low-income families. 82.11 per cent of the respondents reported that their family's annual income was less than 100,000 yuan. In terms of salary expectations, 54.79 per cent of the respondents were willing to accept a minimum monthly salary of 3,500-4,500 yuan, and 40.43 per cent hoped to earn between 5,000 and 7,000 yuan per month after graduation.

Table 3

Family Income and Salary Expectations of Respondents

Item	Category	Percentage
Family annual income	Below 100,000 yuan	82.11%
Minimum acceptable monthly salary	3,500–4,500 yuan	54.79%
Expected monthly salary after graduation	5,000–7,000 yuan	40.43%

Note. Family annual income refers to respondents' reported household income. Minimum acceptable monthly salary and expected monthly salary after graduation refer to students' salary expectations in future employment.

Therefore, the students' employment decisions were not based on ideal professionalism. Instead, they thought that preschool education would be a good career in the future, and considered whether positions related to preschool education offered stable employment, a reasonable salary, welfare benefits and manageable working hours. This is to show that the higher vocational students' employment choices are more practical.

Career Cognition and Professional Recognition

Based on the above results, most of the students had a basic understanding of the preschool education profession, but this recognition of the profession was not fully stable. Students are more aware of the social and educational functions of preschool education and how it promotes the all-around development of children. However, they were more risk-averse regarding career development prospects and occupational status and long-term professional appeal.

The mean values of career cognition in the questionnaire were 3.59 and 3.74, respectively. The top reason was a sense of social responsibility for one's work, and the lowest reason was a lack of career advancement prospects.

Table 4

Career Cognition of Respondents

Dimension	Mean
Perceived social value of preschool education	3.74
Perceived career development prospects	3.59
Overall range of career cognition items	3.59–3.74

Note. Higher mean scores indicate more positive perceptions of the relevant dimension.

Therefore, there is a conflict between the professional value perceived and the reluctance to work. Students were aware of the social significance of preschool education, but they had low expectations for the future development prospects of their studies. Thus, career cognition is one of the reasons students want to work after graduation.

Internship Experience and Practical Preparation

Students' Internships provide them with practical application experience. According to the questionnaire report, 376 students filled in the part about internships. Among them, 44.68 per cent had been doing an internship for less than a month, 29.52 per cent for one to three months, 9.84 per cent for three to six months, and 15.96 per cent for more than six months. According to the above data, many of the students have had short internships.

According to the results, the practical ability improvement achieved by students after participating in internships is shown below. Specifically, 81.12% of the students said their children's observation skills had improved, and 65.16% believed that their children were better organised in their play activities.

Table 5
Internship Experience and Practical Gains

Item	Category	Percentage
Internship duration	Less than 1 month	44.68%
Internship duration	1–3 months	29.52%
Internship duration	3–6 months	9.84%
Internship duration	More than 6 months	15.96%
Internship gain	Improved child observation ability	81.12%
Internship gain	Improved activity organization ability	65.16%

Note. Percentages in this table are based on the respondents who completed the internship-related section of the questionnaire.

Therefore, the research believes that internships have provided students with hands-on experience in early childhood education. A short-term internship will not provide enough time for the students in early childhood education to learn deeply, and they may lose interest in the field. Therefore, the experience of an internship should be considered in terms of how long one participates, what kind of quality it has, and how in-depth the tasks are.

Family Support and Employment Pressure

Another reason for a student's choice of employment is support from their family. The Attitude of family members towards preschool education can affect the confidence and willingness of students with higher vocational preschool education to enter this field. According to the results of the questionnaire, students' families offer some support. The mean scores of the family-related items were 3.38 and 3.55. The highest was the family's desire for stable employment, and the lowest was direct influence by family on choosing a career.

Table 6
Family Support of Respondents

Dimension	Mean
Family expectation for employment stability	3.55
Family influence on career decision-making	3.38
Overall range of family support items	3.38–3.55

Note. Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived family support or influence.

Therefore, the family does not directly dictate where a student will study later, but rather creates an environment for that choice. Employment pressure has also led some students to change their plans for obtaining jobs, as shown in the following categories: desired salary level, job competition, academic background, work stress, social status, and future prospects. Therefore, students' employment intention was the result of an interaction between their own will and external pressure.

School Support and Career Guidance Needs

Based on the above results, school support and career guidance are necessary for students' employment preparation. Many of the students had received only basic training in the areas above, and were therefore unsure how to look up job information or prepare for job interviews. Therefore, it can be assumed that students' desire to work is affected by other circumstances as well as their own choices.

Career guidance for preschool education students needs to take into account both professional and practical aspects of their life after school. Students need to know about the open jobs, wages and other benefits for employed workers, required qualifications, long-term growth prospects, etc. Without this information, students will be forced to choose their own careers out of necessity.

Generally speaking, the results show that the intention to work by students is affected by all kinds of factors, including their values for life, aspirations for the future, participation in work activities, family circumstances, pressure from various sources, and support from educational institutions. The students' choices of careers are relatively practical; they know that preschool education is worth pursuing, but they are also very concerned about such factors as the level of salary, job stability, welfare benefits, work pressure and prospects for career development. The above results provide the foundation for the pedagogical implications to be discussed in the next section.

Conclusion

Examine the employment intention and related factors of students majoring in preschool education at higher vocational colleges. According to the above data, the students' intention to work was not constant. Although many of the respondents wished to study at preschool education institutions, their choices were not uniform; thus, professional training does not guarantee that they will enter the preschool education sector after graduation.

Based on the above study, various reasons are responsible for differences in students' employment intentions, including their values for work, understanding of careers, internship experiences, family support, work pressure and school support. Students were more likely to consider how they would use their future jobs in practice and took into account factors such as pay, stability of employment, benefits and services provided, work stress and career prospects. It can be seen that the students' choice of career also considered both professional prestige and practical life.

Based on the above data, adding professional-level curriculum teaching cannot significantly boost the students' motivation for work. To strengthen career cognition education theoretically, improve the quality of internships, provide realistic employment information, and enhance career guidance services, higher vocational colleges need to undertake these tasks. The above will help the students know their future direction better and make appropriate selections for themselves.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Pedagogical Implications

Based on the results of this study, some pedagogical suggestions have been proposed for higher vocational colleges that run preschool education courses.

1. Strengthen career cognition education

Strengthen career cognition education for students in higher vocational colleges at all times during their professional training. According to the above data, most students are aware of the positive impact of preschool education on society, but they are still worried about the career prospects and living conditions in the workplace after graduation. Therefore, career cognition education should not only highlight the value of preschool education but also help students understand the demands of professions, career development paths, channels for qualification promotion, and long-term growth prospects for preschool teachers. It may help the students form an all-encompassing and realistic concept of the profession.

2. Improve the quality of internship experience

Internships should be regarded as necessary stages of professional training, rather than simply being a graduation requirement. The results indicate that internships can help students learn to observe children and organise activities in practice; however, the length of some students' internships was relatively short. Therefore, higher vocational colleges should enhance the quality of internships by having students engage in actual preschool education work more often, strengthening mentor guidance, and organizing reflection activities after internships. A high-quality internship can help students apply what they have learned in class to practice and explore if a career in preschool education is right for them.

3. Provide realistic employment information

The students' reasons for working include a wide range of practical needs, such as income and living expenses, job stability, welfare services, work stress and development opportunities. Therefore, the higher vocational colleges should offer students more accurate and practical information about employment. The above information should cover the salary range of preschool education staff, all kinds of employment organisations, welfare facilities, necessary qualifications, career development paths, and differences in the labour market at different regions. Help the students set practical goals for the future and independently plan their own studies.

4. Enhance school-based career guidance services

Improve school-based career guidance and integrate it into all areas of vocational education. Based on the above findings, some support is required for students in terms of employment information, internship recommendations, job-hunting skills, interview preparation, salary negotiation, and career planning. Career guidance should not only be offered in the last year before graduation. Therefore, a higher vocational college should offer continuous support for professional learning at all times, from the start of studies until one graduates or enters the workforce. It can help the students better understand their future and prepare for life outside school.

5. Promote family-school communication

Support from the family and the expectations of the family were linked to a student's selection of work for stability, earnings and social recognition. Therefore, the higher vocational college should contact the family as needed. Schools can help parents learn about the features, values and development prospects of preschool education, and then give better support for students' career choices by choosing based on reason. Strengthen communication channels between families and schools to address any misunderstandings in teaching young children and empower them with self-determination in choosing the next stage of their lives.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study provides some references for the employment intention and influencing factors of preschool education students in higher vocational colleges, several areas for future research have also been identified.

1. Combine questionnaire surveys with qualitative interviews

The top source of the data was questionnaires. The survey gathered some information on students' desires for work and the reasons behind this desire, but not all the reasons for their choices have been revealed. Future research can use questionnaires and semi-structured interviews together to explore more in detail the students' actual experiences, worries, desires and reservations about working in early childhood education.

2. Conduct longitudinal research on actual employment outcomes

A cross-sectional design was used in this study to explore students' intentions to be employed at one time. However, with more professional learning and internship experiences, students will change their plans for work and life. Future studies can be designed in a longitudinal manner to follow students from school through graduation and their subsequent employment. Thus it will be known whether the students' intention to be employed matches the actual employment behaviour.

3. Expand comparative and explanatory analysis

Future research could compare students from different areas and types of higher vocational colleges, as well as different grades and family backgrounds, to identify groups with different intentions to work. In the future, other research may be conducted to investigate how career cognition, employment values, internship experience, family support, employment pressure and school support interactively affect students' intention to work by employing regression analysis, structural equation modelling or other mixed-method approaches. It would provide a more organised explanation of the reasons for students' career choices.

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