

CAREER EXPECTATION DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS*

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the career expectation differences between social sciences and physical education students. The participants were 306 students aged between 18 and 32 years, MAge = 20.32, SD = 2.39, 178 enrolled in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports and 128 students enrolled in the Faculty of Social Sciences (42%). Career discrepancy was measured with Career Discrepancy Scale (Creed & Hood, 2015), translated for the purpose of this study to assess the four dimensions of career discrepancy: achievement discrepancy, effort discrepancy, standards discrepancy, and ability discrepancy. The results show that there are significant differences for all the four domains of career discrepancy, with sports students reporting lower scores. In the conclusions, the practical implications of the obtained results are discussed.

Key words: Career expectation, Career discrepancy, Sport students, Social sciences students.

1. Introduction

Discrepancies between professional goals and their achievement can be the cause of many negative affects. A research pointed out the relationship between the negative feedback provided by those around young people regarding their professional discrepancies, on a sample of 420 young people, with an average age of 20.3 years. Their conclusions were that the negative feedback accentuated career discrepancies, and these could be counteracted by the positive involvement of young

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people in their careers, namely through exploration and better planning (Creed, Wamelink & Hu, 2015).

A similar study involved 287 young people with an average age of 23.79 years. Discrepancies between their goals and professional progress were associated with more suffering felt towards their career, with a lower level of calling towards the chosen direction and, all this, against the background of constant negative feedback. Thus, as the authors pointed out, young people should be helped in the sense of developing self-regulation mechanisms, coping and discovering the meaning and significance of life (Praskova & McPeake, 2022).

If this meaning and direction to be followed is not found on a personal level, then, against the background of internal dissonance, the discrepancies between career goals and their achievement deepen. For example, a study that surveyed 315 young people, with an average age of 19.52 years, came to the conclusion that this negative background can be strengthened, in young adults, by the decisions that their parents make on their behalf, decisions which lead young people to even more compromises, renunciations and regrets in the professional sphere (Widyowati, Hood, Duffy & Creed, 2024b).

Not to have success from the professional point of view is a psychosocial cost and the personal impact is devastating. Unachieved goals are associated with depressive states and a much lower satisfaction related to work (Hardie, 2014).

1.1. What is the career discrepancy?

Career discrepancy is defined as the difference between the person's immediate reality and the person's professional future goals, a discrepancy that can be compared to an internal imbalance or an inherent cognitive dissonance and that is part of any negative projection on the future (Bandura, 2001).

Thus, young people should set their goals very clearly, define them very well, be as specific as possible, and, perhaps most importantly, they have to learn to monitor the progress towards their achievement, thus managing these discrepancies (Higgins, 1987).

Positive experiences of validation, of continuous achievement could help to reduce the dissonance, and to continuously check if they are on the right path to achieving the goals or not. These experiences can be translated, among students, by participating in volunteer activities, professional practice, professional counseling and personal development. When someone notices the appearance of dissonances, they could also resort to behaviors through which they can increase their effort to pursue the goal, the initially proposed objectives, for example, by spending more time on studying. Also, the initial goal or objective should constantly be subject to evaluation, either by diminishing it or fragmenting it into several objectives, easier to achieve, or even by giving up a certain objective (even giving up studying for a certain career). It's also about career discrepancy when the young person appreciates that he has reached his professional goal before this aspect has happened, a situation in which he will have a tendency to set another goal, higher and more difficult to achieve, in the conditions in which not even the initial one was not reached, so the career discrepancy increases even more (Bandura & Locke, 2003).

From the perspective of specialized literature, another cause of career discrepancy is the feedback that young people register. If the feedback is negative regarding their future goals, they tend to become defensive, but behaviors of exploring new goals and adjusting old ones may also appear (Anderson & Mounts, 2012). Young people tend to feel that they are failing in these conditions. The compromise that some of them accept in their careers, either in career jobs they are not satisfied with, or in the preparation for professional directions that were not their aspiration, but rather their parents ones, report feelings of dissatisfaction related to work (Fejfar & Hoyle, 2000).

Self-esteem, confidence in one's own person tends to decrease due to academic discrepancies. In order to counter these effects, students should act in the direction of deepening the available courses in areas for which they do not feel sufficiently prepared, get involved in as many academic tasks as possible and monitor their progress. All these behaviors also lead to an exploration of the occupational field for which the student is preparing, thus the young person succeed in making a clearer hierarchy of their occupational interests (Kerpelman *et al.*, 1997).

The initial studies that researched career discrepancy, achieved this by measuring the levels of anxiety felt by the young people regarding their future career, and the measurement was an indirect one, being rather evaluated the distance between the level of professional aspiration and occupational expectations (Anderson & Mounts, 2012). Among other concepts that defined career discrepancy, we found goal achievement (Brunstein, 1993) or professional success (Buddeberg-Fischer, Stamm, Buddeberg & Klaghofer, 2008), against the background of the lack of a standardized instrument to measure career discrepancy.

Thus, there was a need to have a valid tool for measuring the career discrepancy. Two researchers, Creed and Hood (2015), built and validated a scale with twelve items to measure career discrepancy. The authors identified four dimensions of the discrepancy, namely: achievement discrepancy (item sample = "I am making progress on my career goals, but I don't think I have achieved enough to get the career I want"), effort discrepancy (item sample = "I am working hard, but still doubt I will end up with the career I would really like"), standards discrepancy (item sample = "I have an image of my dream job, but I think it is out of my reach"), and ability discrepancy (item sample= "I am not sure I am capable of meeting the requirements for the career I really want"). The scale was validated on 615 participants. Validity was supported by finding negative associations with career decision certainty and positive associations with anxiety. This scale was also used by us, at the level of this study and applied to a number of 306 students.

Setting career goals and not fulfilling them is not a singular aspect in anyone's life, but the effects of this mismatch are much stronger among young adults (Seiffge-Krenke & Gelhaar, 2008). The use of a screening tool is only the first step towards detecting and analyzing these discrepancies and counteracting, as much as possible, their negative effects, by engaging young people in exploration behaviors and making correct decisions, which will reduce the career discrepancy (Creed & Hood, 2015). Research indicates that career discrepancies can have lasting effects,

influencing not just initial employment outcomes but also long-term career satisfaction and progression. Graduates who begin their careers in positions that do not align with their training may experience delayed advancements and diminished job satisfaction over time. In summary, addressing student career discrepancies requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between educational experiences, labor market conditions, and individual circumstances. Institutions can take proactive measures by providing practical career counseling, enhancing curricular relevance, and fostering industry partnerships to better align educational outcomes with workforce needs.

1.2. What are the differences regarding students' expectations from the labor market?

The expectations that students hold regarding the labor market can significantly vary based on several factors, such as socioeconomic background, educational level, field of study, and geographical location. Understanding these differences is crucial for educational institutions aiming to bridge the gap between education and employment.

Research indicates that students today place a high value on job satisfaction and the intrinsic meaning of their work. Many graduating students are seeking roles that not only offer financial stability but also align with their personal values and contribute positively to society. This contrasts sharply with previous decades, where financial compensation often took precedence over job fulfillment (Hartung, Weßling & Hillmert, 2022).

Another notable difference is the emphasis on work-life balance and flexibility in work arrangements. This shift is partly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which showcased the potential for remote work and prompted students to seek employment that offers similar benefits.

Students also exhibit varied expectations regarding the skills and competencies that employers seek. Many graduates expect their education to provide them with not just theoretical knowledge but also practical competencies and soft skills like communication and teamwork. This expectation has evolved, as previous generations often anticipated that technical proficiency alone would suffice for employability (Jerrim, 2011).

In light of economic fluctuations, students express growing concern about job security and stability, which is particularly pronounced in fields vulnerable to automation and technological disruption. As a result, students are increasingly favored towards industries perceived as resilient to economic changes, seeking assurance of career longevity (Avraamova & Verpakhovskaia, 2007).

Students enter higher education with a set of expectations their future careers, often influenced by their aspirations, societal expectations, and the perceived prestige of certain fields. However, the reality they face post-graduation can differ significantly. For example, a student may graduate with a degree in biochemistry expecting to enter a laboratory-based career, only to find that entry-level positions in the field are scarce, requiring additional qualifications or experience (Cox, 2024).

A study compared the factors that determine students to continue working to achieve their career goals, namely those from the internal plan and those from the external plan. The study was a longitudinal one and involved 140 students, during the faculty and immediately after graduation. The results indicated that the students who considered that the proposed objectives will be achieved through effort and knowledge of their field of study achieve their career objectives to a greater extent than the students who attribute the achievement of their professional objectives to external factors and they no longer are realizing efforts in this direction (Shane & Heckhausen, 2016).

An optimal level of self-knowledge, knowledge of the level of training leads to a more accurate assessment of professional interests, according to Holland's theory (1997), as well as more realistic appreciations and aspirations. At the level of a research, it was proven that the optimal age, with the highest consistency for establishing these objectives, is 17 years old. In addition, based on the level of self-knowledge, interests crystallize towards a single direction, which greatly facilitates the choices and directions to be followed (Napolitano *et al.*, 2020).

294 Italian students were involved in another study that aimed to analyze career goal management strategies. These proved to be associated with professional objectives, thus, assimilation was positively associated with involvement in achieving professional objectives and negatively with non-involvement, while employability mediated the relationship between the professional objectives and assimilation (Chiesa *et al.*, 2024).

Another study highlighted an association between the discrepancies between the aspirations and the expectations regarding the career of 677 students. These were also associated with self-efficacy and professional barriers and own identity. The study reported very large differences between students' expectations and the reality of the labor market, and even more, they believed that they were preparing for some jobs that no longer existed in the occupational standards (Metz, Fouad & Ihle-Helledy, 2009).

A negative feedback proved to be the reason for increasing professional discrepancies and achieving career goals. 100 professionally active young people were involved in this study (students and/or employees), which introduced the mentality of increasing professional skills, as a moderator between career discrepancies and career objectives, but this did not moderate the mediation relationship between the two of them, a result that leads to the conclusion that there are still many variables through which negative feedback influences the career of young people (Nieminen, 2024).

There is often a gap between the skills that employers demand and those that students acquire during their educational programs. This skills mismatch can lead to underemployment, where graduates find themselves in jobs that do not require their level of educational attainment. For instance, graduates with degrees in humanities might find themselves in sales roles rather than positions relevant to their field of study.

In certain disciplines, there can be an oversupply of graduates relative to available job opportunities. Economic conditions can greatly influence career

trajectories. In times of economic downturn, even highly skilled graduates may struggle to find employment in their desired fields, leading to increased occurrences of career discrepancy. Personal circumstances, such as family obligations and financial constraints, can significantly affect a student's career path. Additionally, societal influences, including cultural expectations and network opportunities, can either facilitate or hinder students in achieving their career goals (Gorgodze, Macharashvili & Kamladze, 2020).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

In the present study, 306 students aged between 18 and 32 years participated, with a mean age of $M = 20.32$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 2.39$. Among them, 178 were enrolled in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports (58%), and 128 were enrolled in the Faculty of Social Sciences (42%). Of these participants, 205 were in their first year (67%), and 101 were in their third year (33%). Regarding marital status, 156 were single (51%), and 150 were in a relationship (49%).

The students were informed about this study during class, provided with a detailed description of the study's objectives, and invited to participate by signing up through a link. The sampling was a convenience one, with voluntary participation, and students were not compensated in any way for participating. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms. The first section included the informed consent, the participation agreement form, and consent for the processing of personal data. By selecting the "yes" button, students confirmed their agreement to participate.

Completing the questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes. All ethical research conditions were met, including ensuring participants' anonymity and data confidentiality. The collected data were downloaded into an Excel file, then organized and processed using the Jamovi statistical analysis software (The jamovi project, 2022).

2.2. Instruments

Demographics were collected through a list of questions regarding participants' age, gender, faculty, study year, and marital status.

Career discrepancy was measured with Career Discrepancy Scale (Creed & Hood, 2015), translated in Romanian by the authors of the present study in accordance with specific current standards. The instrument comprises 12 items and measures four dimensions of career discrepancy: achievement discrepancy, effort discrepancy, standards discrepancy, and ability discrepancy. Responses are given on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 - total disagreement and 5 - total agreement. Scores are obtained by summing the points for each item corresponding to the respective subscales. High scores indicate a greater degree of discrepancy. Examples of items: "My plans are not working out to get the career I really want", "I doubt I can meet the standards of entry to my ideal career".

2.3. Design and statistical analyses

The study has a cross-sectional design with one single measurement. For hypothesis testing we employed an Independent Samples t test.

2.4. Results

Descriptive statistics

Means, standard deviations, Cronbach Alpha coefficients and correlations between variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, Cronbach Alpha coefficients and correlations between variables

	M	SD	α	DCAC	DCEF	DCST	DCAB
DCAC	6.66	2.83	.77	1			
DCEF	5.81	2.87	.85	.67**	1		
DCST	5.87	3.05	.79	.70**	.87**	1	
DCAB	6.16	3.21	.87	.71**	.83**	.90**	1

Note: **. $p < .01$

DCAC – achievement discrepancy, DCEF – effort discrepancy, DCST – standards discrepancy, DCAB – ability discrepancy

Descriptive statistics showed that the highest score is reported for achievement discrepancy, $M = 6.66$, $SD = 2.83$, and the lowest score is reported for effort discrepancy, $M = 5.81$, $SD = 2.87$. At the same time, the correlations between the dimensions of career discrepancy are positive and strongly significant, the highest being reported between standards discrepancy and ability discrepancy, $r = .90$, $p < .01$ and the lowest being reported between achievement discrepancy and effort discrepancy, $r = .67$, $p < .01$.

2.5. Hypothesis testing

H1. *Sports students will report a lower career discrepancy compared with social sciences students for all the four domains (achievement, effort, standards, and ability)*

To test this hypothesis, we carried on an Independent Samples t test.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for the four career discrepancy domains, according to students' faculty

	Group	N	M	SD	ESM
DCAC	Physical education	178	6.22	2.83	.21
	Social sciences	128	7.28	2.73	.24
DCEF	Physical education	178	5.29	2.60	.20
	Social sciences	128	6.54	3.09	.27
DCST	Physical education	178	5.41	2.75	.21
	Social sciences	128	6.51	3.33	.29
DCAB	Physical education	178	5.62	2.89	.22
	Social sciences	128	6.91	3.48	.31

Note: DCAC – achievement discrepancy, DCEF – effort discrepancy, DCST – standards discrepancy, DCAB – ability discrepancy

Table 3. Independent Samples t test for differences in career discrepancy according to students' faculty

	t	df	p	MD	SED	d
DCAC	-3.29	304.00	.001	-1.06	.32	-.38
DCEF	-3.83 ^a	304.00	< .001	-1.25	.33	-.44
DCST	-3.15 ^a	304.00	.002	-1.10	.35	-.37
DCAB	-3.53 ^a	304.00	< .001	-1.29	.37	-.41

Note: ^a Levene's test is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances

DCAC – achievement discrepancy, DCEF – effort discrepancy, DCST – standards discrepancy, DCAB – ability discrepancy

The results show that there are significant differences for all the four domains of career discrepancy, with sports students reporting lower scores. For achievement discrepancy, sports students reported $M = 6.22$, $SD = 2.83$ compared with social sciences students, $M = 7.28$, $SD = 2.73$, $DM = -1.06$, $t(304) = -3.29$, $CI95\% (-1.70, -.43)$, $p < .01$, effect size $d = -.38$. For effort discrepancy, sports students reported $M = 5.29$, $SD = 2.60$ compared with social sciences students, $M = 6.54$, $SD = 3.09$, $DM = -1.25$, $t(304) = -3.83$, $CI95\% (-1.89, -.61)$, $p < .01$, effect size $d = -.44$. For standards discrepancy, sports students reported $M = 5.41$, $SD = 2.75$ compared with social sciences students, $M = 6.51$, $SD = 3.33$, $DM = -1.10$, $t(304) = -3.15$, $CI95\% (-1.78, -.41)$, $p < .01$, effect size $d = -.37$. For ability discrepancy, sports students reported $M = 5.62$, $SD = 2.89$ compared with social sciences students, $M = 6.91$, $SD = 3.48$, $DM = -1.29$, $t(304) = -3.53$, $CI95\% (-2.01, -.57)$, $p < .01$, effect size $d = -.41$.

Taking into account these results, we may say that career discrepancy is lower in sports students compared to social sciences students.

3. Discussions

Career Discrepancy Scale (Creed & Hood, 2015) used by us in this study was created and validated, against the background of the need to have a standardized psychometric tool to evaluate the discrepancies felt by young adults between their career goals and the goals of significant others around them (Sawitri, Creed & Perdhana, 2021).

The scale correlates positively with satisfaction and optimism related to the professional future and negatively with negative discrepancies between career goals and has a particular practical applicability, since the tools for evaluating professional goals are very few in number (Akmal, Creed, Hood & Duffy, 2021).

The same authors tested a sample of 292 young adults, $MAge = 18.58$ years, in a cross-sectional study. The conclusions were that career calling and certain situational factors, such as parents' profession, are positively associated with professional satisfaction and optimism, describing some young people who already

perceived themselves as motivated and able to succeed professionally (Akmal, Hood, Duffy & Creed, 2024).

236 young people, with an average age of 21.77 years, were surveyed using the Career Discrepancy Scale (Creed & Hood, 2015), the results showing that career suffering explains the relationship between career discrepancy and indecision regarding the career. Knowing these aspects, one could intervene on the management of these discrepancies between desires and reality and the suffering that arises from their mismatch (Widyowati, Hood, Duffy & Creed, 2024a).

Our study involved students enrolled in the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports and in the Faculty of Social Sciences. As shown by the differences obtained in sports students, they feel a significant lower career discrepancy compared to those from social sciences.

This aspect could be translated by the fact that these students rely on their physical abilities and thus perceive the professional path as more linear, since they have a set of their own skills, in addition to those specific to each profession (Eriksen, 2022; Mann & DiPrete, 2013).

Psychological factors influencing academic motivation for sport student are significantly higher athletic identity and lower academic motivation, against the backdrop of strong career decision-making self-efficacy (Weatherly & Chen, 2019).

However, for the sports field as well, research shows an increased interest of men in this field, compared to women. Young women's lack of interest in pursuing a degree in sport science, together with observed gender differences in perceived social supports, career goal setting, may have important practical implications (Serra *et al.*, 2019).

A study aimed to analyze the career plans of 482 students at the Faculty of Physical Education. There were made associations between career beliefs and the mother's level of education, while students who had participated in a career planning course perceived their education as more adequate and the choice as a correct one, compared to those who did not attend such a course. There were no significant differences according to marital status, father's level of education, family members playing sports and salary expectations (Yavuz Eroğlu, 2020).

Regarding the social science students, despite the fact that their career options are much more diverse and more recent on the job market, according to the results of our study, they feel a greater discrepancy in their career, in all its fields.

A research carried out on the career expectations of social worker students revealed their very low expectations regarding their professional career, namely, although they hoped to obtain a full-time job, they had no expectations regarding promotion, but neither availability to practice at present, and against the background of very limited places in this sense (Mathias-Williams & Thomas, 2002).

Perhaps these students feel these discrepancies more strongly also because their training is not for only one professional field, and entering this profession differs from other jobs, the employers also have different expectations from them, empathy being one of the important expectations, then a certain specific profile of the candidate (Egetenmeyer, 2010).

The social science student's self-reliance, interests, intentions, and career expectations are their defining traits (Akman, 2016), while in addition to all these above-mentioned qualities, the students of the faculty of physical education have both physical abilities and practice sports, which increases their self-confidence and, implicitly, their confidence in professional success (Zhao, 2023).

However, the majority of the students believe that the education from the university environment, is not sufficient, neither for the profession, nor for satisfying the expectations of the labor market, most of them having a common idea that for finding a good job, the university education is the most important condition in order to realize their professional goals (Zengin, Sen & Solmaz, 2011).

4. Conclusions

The practical implications of this study could find the applicability especially in the programs of career counseling and personal development for the students from social sciences. They should be helped to develop their essential skills for the projects they are preparing, to increase the trust in themselves, to have a level of empathy as high as possible and thus the discrepancy between the objectives of reality and career could be diminished. If they entered with a clear set of knowledge and personal and professional skills on the labor market, this transition could be done in a direction that would be an advantage for them. Thus, their objectives would align with the career plans, the faith in professional success would be higher, their own definition about the ideal career would be better defined.

The phenomenon of career discrepancy among sports students presents an interesting case study in the intersection of athletic commitment, academic performance, and post-graduation employment opportunities.

Student-athletes typically devote an extensive portion of their schedules to training, competitions, and related commitments, often leaving them with limited time for academic pursuits or internships. This can result in lower academic achievement compared to non-athlete peers, potentially affecting their employability upon graduation. Moreover, the rigorous demands of a sporting life can lead to an underdeveloped skill set in fields outside of athletics, as students may lack opportunities to gain professional experience relevant to their career aspirations. Many student-athletes come from diverse backgrounds, and their financial stability can heavily influence their career choices after graduation. Those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may prioritize immediate employment opportunities over pursuing their passion, leading to a career path that diverges from their academic or athletic aspirations.

On the other hand, career discrepancy among social science students is a multifaceted issue that warrants a comprehensive examination through various lenses, including educational theory, labor market dynamics, and socio-economic factors. Social science disciplines encompass a wide range of fields, such as sociology, psychology, political science, and economics. Each of these fields not only equips students with a unique set of skills but also influences their career trajectories in distinct ways. The intrinsic value of a social science education often

lies in its emphasis on critical thinking, analytical skills, and an understanding of human behavior and social structures, yet these competencies may not directly translate into specific career paths.

One contributing factor to career discrepancies is the mismatch between the expectations of students and the realities of the job market. Social science students enter their programs with a predefined notion of secure and rewarding career prospects; however, this may not be aligned with the actual employment opportunities available post-graduation. For instance, while graduates may possess strong qualitative and quantitative skills, they may find themselves underprepared for a labor market that increasingly favors specialized, technical skills, particularly in fields like data analysis and information technology. Furthermore, it's imperative to consider the impact of institutional structures and support systems. These discrepancies also reflect broader structural issues within the economy and labor market, such as changes in workforce demand, automation, and the perceived value of social sciences compared to more traditional STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) or philological ones (letters and foreign languages). This ultimately shapes not only the immediate employment outcomes for graduates but also their long-term career satisfaction and progression.

Career discrepancy, with all its dimensions, can be the subject for future research, which also can involve students from other specializations, such as the technical ones, STEM fields. It would be interesting to investigate which of these categories of students feel the most or the least discrepancy about the chosen professional path. And, at the same time, these studies would also show what is the set of skills that each student relies on for the ideal career, depending on the faculty they attend, as well as the set of skills that each would need, thus professional career counseling programs and personal development programs can be personalized for each category of students.

5. Limits

Within the limits of the present study, we mention the involvement of students from only two fundamental fields of study: sports science and social sciences. Perhaps if the students' fields of study had been more diverse or had come from closer fields, for example: social sciences and STEM, the results would have been even more relevant.

Another limitation is that the career discrepancy was not associated with any other individual or contextual variables, in order to check what other factors determine the discrepancies felt by the young people and what strategies they use to ameliorate these negative effects.

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