



## Research Article

# Effects of Discipline-based Career Course on Nursing Students' Career Search Self-efficacy, Career Preparation Behavior, and Perceptions of Career Barriers



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## SUMMARY

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a discipline-based career course on perceptions of career barriers, career search self-efficacy, and career preparation behavior of nursing students. Differences in career search self-efficacy and career preparation behavior by the students' levels of career barriers were also examined.

**Methods:** The study used a modified one-group, pretest–posttest design. The convenience sample consisted of 154 undergraduate nursing students in a university. The discipline-based career course consisted of eight sessions, and was implemented for 2 hours per session over 8 weeks. The data were collected from May to June in 2012 and 2013 using the following instruments: the Korean Career Indecision Inventory, the Career Search Efficacy Scale, and the Career Preparation Behavior Scale. Descriptive statistics, paired *t* test, and analysis of covariance were used to analyze the data.

**Results:** Upon the completion of the discipline-based career course, students' perceptions of career barriers decreased and career search self-efficacy and career preparation behavior increased. Career search self-efficacy and career preparation behavior increased in students with both low and high levels of career barriers. The difference between the low and high groups was significant for career search self-efficacy but not for career preparation behavior.

**Conclusions:** The discipline-based career course was effective in decreasing perceptions of career barriers and increasing career search self-efficacy and career preparation behavior among nursing students.

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## Introduction

Career development is an important task for college students in determining their career paths [1]. As high school education in Korea revolves around preparation for the college entrance exam, students lack educational opportunities for career development [2]. Given this background, there has been increased emphasis on the importance of career education in the college setting. In an effort to help college students with career development, many institutions of higher education provide their students with various types of career services, such as career courses for which they receive credit, individual and group counseling, workshop, and computer interventions. These career services have been found to have positive effects on students' career development [3]. The career services

that college students wanted the most were “talking with professionals” and “taking a career-related subject” [4], and the career education content that participants were most interested in related to job interviews and self-understanding [5]. Therefore, it is important to provide practical and major-specific career education to students.

Career education for nursing students is also receiving a greater amount of attention. The pressure from society on the profession to prepare for more expanded roles of nurses in the healthcare system and the development of new nursing careers over the years have driven the need for an improvement of nursing career education in terms of quantity and quality [6,7]. Research findings show that 43.2% of nursing students exhibit uncertainty in their career decision making [8] and that 13.0% of newly licensed registered nurses resign from their jobs by the end of the first year of employment, while 37.0% of them intend to leave the profession [9]. Therefore, efficient and effective methods of career education and knowledge of nursing students' characteristics are worthwhile endeavors.

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However, there are some obstacles to moving forward in career development, such as career barriers. Career barriers mean perceived and experienced difficulties in making a career decision [10]. Many college students perceive the existence of numerous occupational barriers, with these barriers being expressed in either adaptive or maladaptive ways according to the individual's personal perception or situation [11]. Career barriers can also interfere either directly or indirectly in the process of career interests converting to career behavior and career selection [12]. Therefore, for effective career education, it is necessary to collect the information on how nursing students perceive and cope with career barriers when building a career course in nursing education.

The relationship between career barriers and the variables contributing to career development have been reported in various research investigations. Career barriers play a prominent role in directly affecting expectations about one's ability to perform activities related to career exploration and career choice as career-related self-efficacy [13,14]. Career barriers have been found to be negatively related to career-related self-efficacy [1,15–17]. In addition, the lack of career information, a subdomain of career barriers, had the greatest effect on career-related self-efficacy in a study by Shin [16]. Career preparation behavior is a practical and specific career-related behavior [18]. College students in Korea show low levels of career preparation behaviors [18,19]. Career preparation behavior is reported to be both related [12,20] and unrelated [21] to career barriers.

Research on the effects of career courses has demonstrated that career-related self-efficacy [19,22] and career preparation behavior [19] increase after a career course, while perceived career barriers remained at the same levels as before the career course [23].

There are various research findings about the relationship among career course, career barriers, and career development variables. Career barriers have been suggested as the most influential variable in career decision making and preparation process [12]. This finding implies that a career course may have different effects on career development, according to the degree to which career barriers are perceived to be present.

Thus, this study investigated the effects of a discipline-based career course on nursing students' perceptions of career barriers, career search self-efficacy, and career preparation behavior. The study also examined differences in career search self-efficacy and career preparation behavior before and after attending the course in students reporting low and high levels of career barriers.

## Method

### Study design

This investigation employed a modified one-group, pretest–posttest design [24–26]. The study could not use a control group due to the career course being a class that the college required all students to complete.

### Sample

Senior nursing students enrolled in the career course at Eulji University in Korea were recruited by convenience sampling. A total of 154 students (71 in 2012 and 83 in 2013) volunteered for this study.

### Ethical considerations

The Institutional Review Board of Eulji University granted approval for this study (EU 11-45). The purpose of the study, confirmation of anonymity, and voluntary participation were

explained to the participants before the survey, and written consent was obtained. The students were also informed that there would be no disadvantages to nonparticipants and that the collected data would be used for only research purposes.

## Measurements

### Career barriers

Career barriers were measured using the Korean Career Indecision Inventory (K-CII), a self-report questionnaire developed by Tak and Lee [10]. The K-CII consists of 22 items, each of which is measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating respondents' perceptions of higher levels of career barriers. Career barriers consist of five subdomains: lack of career information, lack of necessity recognition, lack of self-identity, indecisiveness, and external barriers. Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient for the study by Tak and Lee [10] was .87. The alpha levels of the current study were .90 for the pretest and .91 for the posttest.

### Career search self-efficacy

Career search self-efficacy was assessed using the Career Search Efficacy Scale, a self-report questionnaire developed by Solberg et al [13] and adapted by Choi and Kim [27]. This instrument consists of 20 items, each of which is measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate higher levels of confidence about one's ability to execute a career search. Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient for the study by Choi and Kim [27] was .93. The alpha levels of the current study were .93 for the pretest and .94 for the posttest.

### Career preparation behavior

Career preparation behavior was measured using the Career Preparation Behavior Scale, a self-report questionnaire developed by Kim and Kim [18] and adapted by Kim [28]. This measure consists of 18 items, each of which is measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*have never done it*) to 5 (*have always done it*). Higher scores indicate higher levels of preparation behavior. Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficients were .84 for Kim and Kim's [18] study and .88 for Kim's [28] study. The alpha levels for this study were .91 for the pretest and .90 for the posttest.

## Procedures

The study was implemented in two stages: course development and application (Figure 1). In the first stage, the contents of the career course were adapted from the National Career Development Guidelines [29] and the findings of the literature review [3,5,30,31]. The course covered the following eight topics (Table 1): (1) self-understanding, (2) changes in workplace and education, (3) discovering nursing careers and qualification system, (4) connecting self-understanding with nursing career, (5) making career development plans, (6) developing self-promotion skills, (7) preparing for job interviews, and (8) rehearsing for a job interview. In the second stage, a one-credit college course was offered to the students under the course title of "Career Design". In each session, the students received some information about each subject at the beginning of the course and participated in learning tasks in pairs, discussions, presentations, and role-playing situations related to the topic, with the researcher's assistance. Six alumni nurses participated as mentors, giving advice to the students about their particular topic of expertise and answering their questions. The students outlined their career paths at the start of the course and elaborated on their plans as the course progressed. At the end of the course, the students submitted portfolios consisting of the

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