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Geography Students' Attitudes toward their Academic Discipline, Continuing Education, and Future Employment Prospects at Takhar University

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ABSTRACT
This study examines geography students' attitudes toward their academic discipline, their willingness to continue studying in the field, and their perceptions of future employment prospects at Takhar University. A descriptive-analytical research design with a survey approach was adopted. Data were collected in the solar year 1404 through a researcher-developed questionnaire administered to all 72 currently enrolled geography students, covering first- to fourth-year students. The questionnaire comprised three main indicators: attitudes toward the academic discipline, willingness to continue studying in the field, and future employment prospects. It was designed using a five-point Likert scale.The findings indicate that students' mean scores exceeded 4 across all three indicators, reflecting positive attitudes, a high level of interest, and an optimistic outlook regarding their academic discipline and future careers. Furthermore, Pearson's correlation coefficient indicates statistically significant relationships among the three indicators. However, age was not significantly associated with these indicators. The overall mean score across the indicators was 4.23, indicating a highly favorable overall attitude among students. The results demonstrate that geography students at Takhar University hold positive and optimistic views of their academic discipline, their willingness to pursue further studies in the field, and their future employment prospects. These findings provide a favorable basis for students' academic and professional development.

KEYWORDS
Continuing education; career prospects; Takhar University; geography; student attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Geography, as a discipline concerned with the interaction between humans and the environment, plays an important role in sustainable development, resource management, urban and rural planning, and strategic analysis (Saikia, 2026). Researchers have increasingly examined how university students understand and make decisions about their academic and professional futures (Goetsch et al., 2010).Students' attitudes toward their academic disciplines and future employment prospects are important factors in their motivation. Their attitudes and expectations regarding their fields of study, willingness to continue studying, and anticipated career opportunities are closely associated with their educational experiences. Factors such as gender, age, academic discipline, interest in the

field, willingness to pursue further studies, and future employment prospects are also considered influential in shaping students' motivation (FarajiKhiyavi et al., 1392). Researchers investigating career choice frequently point out that labor market changes, unemployment, and the continuous growth of information about occupations and educational opportunities can contribute to confusion, uncertainty, and misinformation among students choosing their future careers (Jurgena et al., 2014). Higher education in Afghanistan faces various challenges. One of the central issues concerns students' attitudes toward their academic disciplines. Positive or negative attitudes can directly affect students' motivation, academic achievement, persistence in their chosen fields, and, ultimately, their professional performance (Pajares, 1996). Interest in an academic discipline can promote learning and the advancement of students' knowledge; conversely, a lack of interest may discourage students from continuing their studies (Marzban & Marzban, 1397). Students' attitudes toward employment and unemployment have also become a major concern in contemporary societies (Malekpour & Mohammadi, 1392).In the contemporary world, the choice of an academic discipline, future career prospects, and willingness to continue studying in a chosen field constitute major concerns for university students. Accordingly, this study examines geography students' attitudes toward their academic discipline, their willingness to continue studying in the field, and their future employment prospects at Takhar University.Some researchers argue that negative attitudes toward the humanities are rooted in the social and economic structures of developing societies (Seligman &Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Geography, as a discipline within the humanities, has an established educational history at Takhar University. Nevertheless, students' perceptions of the discipline's status, importance, and prospects in Afghanistan's labor market remain an important question that warrants investigation.

This study seeks to provide an evidence-based picture of the existing situation by examining geography students' attitudes across three principal indicators: their academic discipline, their willingness to continue studying in the field, and their future employment prospects. The findings are intended to provide a basis for informed educational decision-making.Understanding students' attitudes toward their academic disciplines is important for several reasons. On the one hand, positive attitudes are associated with greater intrinsic motivation, academic persistence, and improved performance (Ryan &Deci, 2000). On the other hand, students' perceptions of future employment prospects may influence their decisions to pursue advanced studies and enter the labor market. Therefore, investigating these issues is essential for improving educational planning for geography students at Takhar University.Students' attitudes toward their academic discipline, willingness to continue studying, and future employment prospects can play a fundamental role in the quality of learning in geography and in their preparation for the labor market. Interest in one's occupation is also regarded as an important consideration in employment (Ardabil Mikaeil et al., 1398).

Main Objective:The main objective of this study is to examine geography students' attitudes toward their academic discipline, continuing education, and future employment prospects at Takhar University.

Concept of Attitude and Related Theories -In social psychology, attitude is defined as an overall evaluation of individuals, objects, events, or concepts (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Attitudes comprise three principal components—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—which interact .

In higher education, students' attitudes toward their academic disciplines are recognized as an important consideration in academic success. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) emphasizes that individuals' beliefs in their abilities to perform academic and professional tasks play a central role in shaping their attitudes and behavior.

Accordingly, students who perceive themselves as capable in the humanities are likely to hold more positive attitudes toward their academic disciplines and future career prospects.Similarly, Ryan and Deci's theory of intrinsic motivation (Ryan &Deci, 2000) suggests that students' intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes toward education are strengthened when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied.According to the theory of self-efficacy/self-determination associated with Deci and Ryan, individuals' beliefs in their abilities to perform tasks play a key role in their decisions to continue studying in a particular field and their efforts to achieve future career goals.Experiential theory also emphasizes that practical and field-based activities strengthen students' interest and motivation (Kolb, 1984).

Attitudes and Career Prospects in Higher Education-Attitudes and career structures encompass theories of occupational behavior and systems of career counseling (Hartung & Vess, 2016). Numerous studies have demonstrated that the choice of an academic discipline and attitudes toward it are strongly influenced by career expectations (Super, 1990).

Super's theory of career development describes occupational choice as a gradual process that begins during adolescence and reaches a critical stage during university education. At this stage, students reassess their career goals.

Human life in society involves a range of activities. These activities are shaped not only by experience and knowledge but also by interconnected social, economic, cultural, psychological, and value-based dimensions (Razavi, 1381).

Research findings indicate that students' self-assessment can have a direct and positive influence on their career exploration (Chen et al., 2023). In developing countries, including Afghanistan, factors such as labor market conditions, government employment policies, and societal perceptions of different academic disciplines can substantially influence students' career attitudes (Sultani & Rahmani, 2019).

Students' future career and professional prospects have attracted considerable attention from researchers (Goetsch et al., 2010). Their understanding of future employment constitutes an important indicator of career choice, motivation, and preparedness for entering the labor market (Saikia, 2026).

Previous Research -Numerous studies have examined university students' attitudes toward their academic disciplines at the international level (Kim & Park, 2021). A study of geography students in South Korea found that 78% were satisfied with their academic discipline and held positive attitudes toward their future career prospects (Mansouri et al., 2018).

Research in Iran has also found a significant correlation between humanities students' attitudes toward their academic disciplines and their motivation to continue studying.

In a study conducted in 1402, Seyed Amir Moradian and SajjadBarzouiSileh examined students' attitudes toward their academic disciplines, willingness to continue studying, and future career prospects at Yasuj University of Medical Sciences. Among the 130 participants, 66.3% held negative attitudes toward their academic disciplines, 64.8% expressed negative attitudes toward continuing their studies, and 58.2% held negative views of their future career prospects.

Faraji Khiyavi et al. (1392) investigated the educational expectations and career attitudes of 242 medical sciences students at Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences in Ahvaz. Their findings indicated that the students held favorable views of their academic disciplines and future career prospects.

Malekpour and Mohammadi (1392) examined employment among bachelor's degree graduates in humanities in Bijar County. They found that according to respondents, the most important barriers to employment development were insufficient investment in

infrastructure and a mismatch between university academic disciplines and labor-market requirements.

Estovari and Estovari (1401) also addressed similar issues. Similarly, Farzad Faraji et al. (1392) and Ameneh Marzban et al. (1397) conducted related studies, with their findings generally indicating unfavorable attitudes.

In Afghanistan, relatively few studies have addressed this subject, and the available research suggests that attitudes toward academic disciplines have not been particularly favorable.

Against this background, this study focuses on geography students at Takhar University. It seeks to address the gap in the domestic research literature by examining the correlations among the three principal indicators, the relationships between students' academic year and age and these indicators, and differences among students in the four academic years.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is applied research conducted using a descriptive-analytical method and a quantitative approach. The quantitative component was designed and implemented using a researcher-developed questionnaire.

Statistical Population and Census Sample: The statistical population comprised all students enrolled in the Geography Department of Takhar University during the spring semester of the solar year 1404, from the first to the fourth academic year. The population consisted of 72 students, all of whom were included through a census sampling method.

As shown in Table 1, the respondents were distributed across the four academic years. First-year students accounted for 32 respondents (44.4%), second-year students 13 (18.1%), third-year students 18 (25.0%), and fourth-year students 9 (12.5%).

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Academic Year

Academic year	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid percentage (%)	Cumulative percentage (%)
First year	32	44.4	44.4	44.4
Second year	13	18.1	18.1	62.5
Third year	18	25.0	25.0	87.5
Fourth year	9	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	**72**	**100.0**	**100.0**	-

As presented in Table 2, the respondents had a mean age of 21 years. The oldest respondent was 30 years old, while the youngest was 18. The standard deviation was 2.08279.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Respondents' Age

Statistic	Value
Valid observations (N)	72
Missing observations	0
Mean	21.000
Median	21.000
Standard deviation	2.08279
Range	12.00
Minimum	18.00
Maximum	30.00

Data Collection Instrument: The primary data collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire consisting of 28 items measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire comprised three main sections: (a) attitudes toward the academic discipline, consisting of 9 items; (b) willingness to continue studying in the field, consisting of 9 items; and (c) future employment prospects, consisting of 10 items.The questionnaire's content validity was confirmed by two subject-matter experts. Its reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.92.

Data Analysis: The collected data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics included the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values. At the inferential level, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships between the variables. The statistical significance threshold was set at ($p < 0.05$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Attitudes toward Academic Discipline

Analysis of Attitude toward Academic Discipline Indicator

The following table presents descriptive statistics for the items measuring students' attitudes toward their academic discipline. As the results indicate, the mean score for nearly all items exceeded 4, reflecting highly positive attitudes toward geography. The highest mean score was recorded for the item concerning interest in learning practical geography skills (4.5139), while the lowest was recorded for the perceived positive attitude of society toward geography (4.0139). The overall mean for this indicator was 4.25, indicating a highly favorable assessment.

The high score for interest in learning practical geography skills may also reflect the role of practical subjects and skills, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing (RS), SPSS/statistics, and geography laboratories.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for items measuring attitudes toward academic discipline

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
- Satisfaction with the choice of academic discipline	72	2.00	5.00	4.3056	0.84984
- Alignment of educational objectives and courses with societal needs	72	2.00	5.00	4.0833	0.78274
- Increased interest after studying the discipline	72	1.00	5.00	4.2639	0.94932
- Perceived positive attitude of society toward geography	72	1.00	5.00	4.0139	1.04130
- Interest in studying the discipline from the outset	72	1.00	5.00	4.1389	0.90858
- Interest in the discipline's courses	72	3.00	5.00	4.3194	0.70863
- Interest in learning practical geography skills	72	2.00	5.00	4.5139	0.69187
- Influence of instructors' fairness on student interest	72	2.00	5.00	4.4722	0.76861
- fulfillment of expectations regarding instructors and the department	72	1.00	5.00	4.1944	0.79857
- Overall attitude indicator	71	2.78	5.00	4.2535	0.57034
- Valid N (listwise)	71	-	-	-	-

Willingness to Continue Studying in the Discipline

Analysis of the Continuing Education Indicator

The results indicate that the items measuring willingness to continue studying in geography also received highly favorable ratings. The highest mean score was recorded for willingness to participate in conferences and seminars (4.4167), while the lowest was recorded for the perceived influence of instructors on students' willingness to continue their studies (4.2083). The overall mean for this indicator exceeded 4, indicating a favorable situation.

The high score for willingness to participate in conferences and seminars may be associated with the scientific meetings and conferences organized annually by the Geography Department for instructors and students at the university. These activities may contribute to greater student satisfaction.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Items Measuring Willingness to Continue Studying in Geography

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
- Optimism about continuing education	72	2.00	5.00	4.3472	0.73465
- Greater value of the discipline at higher academic levels	72	1.00	5.00	4.3611	0.84429
- Interest in geographical research activities	72	1.00	5.00	4.3333	0.85580
- Family support for continuing education	72	1.00	5.00	4.4028	0.83345
- Influence of instructors on willingness to continue studying	72	1.00	5.00	4.2083	0.83813
- Willingness to participate in conferences and seminars	72	1.00	5.00	4.4167	0.76453
- Importance of continuing education for career advancement	72	1.00	5.00	4.3750	0.77709
- Interest in field-based and experiential studies	72	2.00	5.00	4.3333	0.87210
- Satisfaction with educational facilities and willingness to continue studying	72	2.00	5.00	4.3472	0.79007
- Overall continuing education indicator	72	3.00	5.00	4.3472	0.51543
- Valid N (listwise)	72	-	-	-	-

Future Employment Prospects

Analysis of Future Employment Prospects Indicator

The following table presents the descriptive statistics for the future employment prospect indicator. Although its overall mean was 4.08, slightly lower than those of the other two indicators, it remained at a favorable level. However, not all items in this indicator had mean scores above 4. The items concerning employment opportunities for graduates and the adequacy of skills for finding employment received the lowest mean scores. These results suggest that students have some concerns regarding employment opportunities and the adequacy of their practical skills. The highest mean score was recorded for interest in working in a field related to their academic discipline.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for items measuring future employment prospects

	Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
-	Optimism about future employment prospects	72	2.00	5.00	4.2222	0.73585
-	Influence of instructors in encouraging students to seek employment	72	1.00	5.00	4.1111	0.84845
-	Confidence in the labor market for this discipline	72	1.00	5.00	4.0556	1.00546
-	Availability of an appropriate career counseling system	72	2.00	5.00	4.1806	0.84464
-	Interest in working in a field related to the academic discipline	72	1.00	5.00	4.2500	0.96049
-	Adequacy of the number of people employed	72	1.00	5.00	4.0417	1.05400
-	Availability of employment opportunities for graduates	72	1.00	5.00	3.8889	1.12031
-	Adequacy of skills for finding employment	72	1.00	5.00	3.8750	1.06066
-	Preparedness to enter the labor market after graduation	72	1.00	5.00	4.0833	1.00351
-	fulfillment of expectations regarding career guidance	72	1.00	5.00	4.0833	1.00351
-	Overall future employment prospects indicator	72	2.50	5.00	4.0792	0.66118
-	Valid N (listwise)	72	-	-	-	-

Comparison of Indicators by Academic Year

The following table compares the mean scores of the three indicators across the four academic years. Second-year students recorded the highest mean scores across all three indicators. Fourth-year students, by contrast, recorded the lowest score for future employment prospects. Across all four academic years, willingness to continue studying received the highest mean score, while future employment prospects received the lowest. These findings may indicate that students develop a more realistic outlook as they approach the end of their studies.

Table 6. Comparison of Mean Scores Across the Three Indicators by Academic Year

Academic year	Attitudes toward the discipline	Continuing education	Future employment prospects	Overall mean
First year	4.20	4.28	4.09	4.19
Second year	4.49	4.56	4.35	4.46
Third year	4.20	4.30	3.97	4.16
Fourth year	4.21	4.38	3.89	4.16
Total	4.25	4.35	4.08	4.23

Correlations Among the Indicators

The following correlation matrix presents Pearson correlation coefficients among the three indicators, the overall mean, and students' ages. The results indicate statistically significant positive relationships among attitudes toward the academic discipline, willingness to continue studying, and future employment prospects at the ($p < 0.01$) level.

The strongest correlation between an individual indicator and the overall mean was reported between continuing education and the overall mean (r = 0.917)). Age was not significantly correlated with any indicator, suggesting that no statistically significant age-related associations were identified in this sample.

Table 7. Pearson correlation matrix for study indicators and age

Variable	Attitudes toward the discipline	Continuing education	Future employment prospects	Overall mean	Age
Attitudes toward the discipline	1	0.748**	0.710**	0.895**	0.016
Continuing education	0.748**	1	0.774**	0.917**	-0.012
Future employment prospects	0.710**	0.774**	1	0.917**	-0.130
Overall mean	0.895**	0.917**	0.917**	1	-0.052
Age	0.016	-0.012	-0.130	-0.052	1

Note: ** indicates statistical significance at the ($p < 0.01$) level, as reported in the source manuscript.

The following table summarizes the overall mean scores, standard deviations, and assessment of the three indicators.

Table 8. Summary statistics for the three study indicators

Indicator	Overall mean	Standard deviation	Assessment
Attitudes toward the academic discipline	4.25	0.57	favorable
Willingness to continue studying in the discipline	4.35	0.52	favorable
Future employment prospects	4.08	0.66	favorable
Overall mean	4.23	0.53	favorable

The findings clearly indicate that geography students at Takhar University hold positive and optimistic attitudes across all three indicators. The overall mean score was 4.23, suggesting that most students demonstrate interest in their discipline, confidence in its value, and an optimistic outlook toward their future. Among the three indicators, willingness to continue studying recorded the highest mean score (4.35). This finding is consistent with the study by Kim and Park (2021), which examined geography students in South Korea and reported that 78% were satisfied with their discipline and held positive views of their future employment prospects. It is also consistent with the research attributed to Mansouri et al. (2018), which found a significant correlation between humanities students' attitudes toward their academic disciplines and their motivation to continue studying.

Within the attitude indicator, interest in learning practical geography skills received the highest mean score (4.51). This finding is consistent with experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), which emphasizes the role of practical and field-based activities in strengthening students' interest and motivation. The lowest mean scores within the future employment indicator were recorded for employment opportunities for graduates (3.89) and the adequacy of disciplinary skills for finding employment (3.88). These findings suggest that students recognize labor-market challenges and the need to strengthen the practical skills included in the curriculum.

Regarding correlations, the significant positive relationships among the three indicators, with coefficients ranging from 0.710 to 0.774, demonstrate that students' attitudes toward their discipline, willingness to continue studying, and perceptions of future employment prospects are associated. This finding is consistent with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1986).

Comparison across academic years showed that second-year students had the highest mean scores for all three indicators. This pattern may reflect their adjustment to the university environment and their acquisition of sufficient information about the discipline. The relatively lower mean score for future employment prospects among fourth-year students (3.89) may indicate a more realistic assessment of employment opportunities and greater awareness of labor market challenges as graduation approaches.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that geography students at Takhar University hold positive and optimistic attitudes toward their academic discipline, future employment prospects, and willingness to continue studying in the field. These attitudes provide a favorable foundation for students' academic and professional development.Despite the favorable overall results across all three indicators, particular attention should be given to strengthen practical skills, improving career guidance, and expanding employment opportunities for graduates within the Geography Department of Takhar University.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen internship programs and fieldwork in geography to better prepare students for the labor market.
2. Establish a specialized career counseling center at the faculty level to guide students in identifying suitable career paths.
3. Organize meetings with employers and government institutions through memoranda of understanding to introduce employment opportunities available to geography graduates.
4. Review the curriculum to improve its alignment with the needs of Afghanistan's labor market.
5. Support student participation in domestic and regional scientific conferences and seminars.
6. Investigate the factors influencing students' attitudes using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches.
7. Monitor the employment status of geography graduates from Takhar University.

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