

Career choices and development among Chinese vocational college students

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Abstract

The study determined the career choices and development among Chinese vocational college students in order to propose a plan of action for students' comprehensive career guidance. It described the profile of the respondents in terms of sex, major, and place of origin; determined the respondents' career choices in terms of personal reasons, social factors, family factors, and school factors; identified the respondents' career development in terms of clarity, confidence, challenge, and change in one's career; tested the differences in responses when grouped according to profile; tested the relationship between career choice and career development; and proposed a plan of action for students' comprehensive career guidance. The descriptive method was used in this study with 500 vocational college students with different profiles. Reliable and validated questionnaire was employed to gather data. The gathered data was analyzed using a one-way ANOVA, t-test, and a quantitative descriptive study technique. Based on the findings, majority of the respondents are male majoring in English living in rural areas. Most of the respondents agreed on the indicators regarding career choices in terms of personal reasons, social, and school factors. There was a disagreement in terms of family factors. Most of the respondents agreed on indicators regarding career development in terms of clarity, and confidence and disagreed on indicators pertaining to challenge, and change in one's career. Findings showed highly significant relationship between career choice and career development. Recommendations for future research were proposed to monitor the progression of vocational students' career development across a specified period to offer valuable insights into the dynamic nature of career aspirations, choices, and progress.

Keywords: career choices, career development, vocational schools

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1. Introduction

The relevance of career choices and development among vocational college students, especially in China, may have drawn considerable attention in today's swiftly evolving worldwide landscape. Choosing a career acts as a stimulus for advancing and enhancing professional growth and development. By pursuing career choices that provide the potential to hone skills, acquire knowledge, and improve, students may consistently grow and excel in their preferred professions. Choosing the right career has a vital impact in determining the direction of students' lives, shaping their sense of personal pleasure, professional development, monetary security, contribution to society, lifestyle choices, how they view themselves, and long-term fulfillment.

Ai et al. (2020) emphasized that as educational institutions continue to evolve, the job environment is deteriorating. A substantial number of university graduates encounter major obstacles when selecting employment possibilities. In this context, career choice plays an integral part in determining the successful employment of college students. Gaining a proper understanding of career selection may increase college students' confidence, improve their future planning, and strengthen their perspectives on employment. This, in turn, enables college students to complete their studies successfully and secure satisfying job opportunities. The advancement of science and technology has led to substantial shifts in economic development, which, in turn, has altered the attributes of careers. To face abrupt shifts brought about by advancement, individuals must possess a greater degree of professional versatility. For undergraduates, particularly during the critical period of development as professionals, strong career flexibility is very important for their future career decisions and growth. When individuals enter professions that align with their interests and targets, they are more likely to encounter an overwhelming sense of relevance and sense in everyday life (Liu et al., 2023).

Globally, vocational education systems exert distinct impacts on students' life decisions and fulfillment, with countries using different tactics, such as Germany's remunerated internships or China's focus on academic assessments (Stahlecker, 2023). Technical training is a crucial component of China's vocational education system. Technical colleges, technician colleges, and other technical institutions have long been vital for fostering an extensive number of highly qualified individuals in China. China's economy is now in need of restructuring and improving. Continuous developments in science and technology are necessary to facilitate the improvement of capabilities in this sector (Zhang & Phakdeephrot, 2023). Evaluation in career choices encompasses multiple components, one of which is career choice. This term refers to an individual's confidence in their capacity to participate in activities related to making career choices (Moreira et al., 2018). In their research, Boo and Kim (2020) sought to contribute to the current pool of information on professional uncertainty by broadening the understanding of the relationship between career indecision, coping techniques, and career skepticism. Their findings revealed that gender, decision status, perceived decisional problems, and decisional anguish influenced the perception of difficulty categories and coping mechanisms.

On the other hand, Zacher et al. (2019) defined career development as the management of tasks, behaviors, and experiences by employers and scholars in academic and higher education settings. This process occurs over time and has implications for the work-related identity of scholars. According to Ng et al. (2024), corporate policies and initiatives will play a crucial role in supporting individuals' career development. Nevertheless, organizations encounter a learning contradiction: their career-enhancing initiatives and policies may enhance the job prospects of their personnel, subsequently leading to their departure from the company. They contended that by providing career assistance and resources, a firm might enhance employees' feelings of organizational support. These views elicit a response that is demonstrated through increased loyalty to the organization, leading to improved work performance and reduced employee turnover. Van Dongen et al. (2024) sought to consolidate research literature on careers, career development, and the factors that impact the career growth of nurses with

doctoral degrees. Their findings led them to conclude that there is a lack of understanding of the professions and professional development of nurses with doctoral degrees. Nurses with doctoral degrees must effectively manage their workloads while juggling multiple part-time occupations. The development of career advancement mechanisms and supportive working environments can provide valuable assistance to careers and career growth.

Preparing a career trajectory is a continuous and tactical process that aids in achieving goals and objectives (Al-Abri & Kooli, 2018). Improving career possibilities for vocational students plays an important role in equipping them to join the workforce. Several studies have emphasized the significance of career choices aligned with vocational students' areas of competence and have investigated methods to enhance their career decision-making process. Nevertheless, research specifically examining the integration of social support, professional self-esteem, and vocational identity in the development of career choices is scarce (Suyitno, 2023). There may be gaps and issues regarding the role of socioeconomic status in shaping career choices and the influence of professional networks and mentorship on career development, which may be under-researched. Researchers may have insufficient emphasis on the disparities between rural and urban locations regarding educational resources and employment prospects. They may tend to prioritize the development of technical abilities, frequently overlooking the cultivation of essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

This study aimed to carefully explore the details of career choices and development among Chinese vocational college students. The subsequent sections examined different aspects such as personal reasons, social factors, family factors, and school factors. The researcher intended to add to the discussion on vocational education and career development in the Chinese context by analyzing the current literature, incorporating empirical data, and providing valuable insights that may direct educational policies, institutional practices, and career guidance initiatives. China has been actively revamping its vocational education system in order to enhance its quality and significance. Studying the career choices and development of vocational students may provide valuable insights for these reforms by detecting discrepancies between educational programs and industry demands. In addition, it may showcase effective techniques and exemplary methods that can be expanded or duplicated nationwide. Ensuring this connection may be essential for establishing a vocational education system that not only fulfills present industry requirements, but also remains flexible in response to future economic changes.

Objectives of the study - The study aimed to determine career choices and development among Chinese vocational college students in order to propose a plan of action for students' comprehensive career guidance. Specifically, this study determined the respondents' career choices in terms of personal reasons, social factors, family factors, and school factors; identified the respondents' career development in terms of clarity, confidence, challenge, and change in one's career; tested the relationship between career choice and career development; and proposed a plan of action for students' comprehensive career guidance.

2. Methods

Research Design - The descriptive method was used in this study by describing the career choices and development of Chinese vocational students. According to Nassaji (2015), descriptive research is a type of research used to describe a phenomenon or an individual or group of people and their characteristics. This is a research strategy that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon under study. The emphasis of this descriptive technique is on the subject of the study rather than on the causes of its activities. To investigate one or more variables, descriptive study designs may employ various research approaches. Researchers, in contrast to experimental investigations, observe and quantify variables without controlling or manipulating them. A survey approach was utilized to investigate the level of AI literacy, attitude and teaching efficacy among Chinese university professors.

Participants - For the study, the researcher selected 425 college students in various Chinese vocational

colleges. The number of the respondents was based on the list given by each participating vocational school. The quantitative research method was utilized in gathering data for the study. Using the Raosoft sample size calculator, a sample size of 425 was included from a total of 500 respondents. The confidence level of this study was 95% and the margin of error was 5%. Simple random sampling techniques will be used to select the teachers to be surveyed.

Instrument - This study utilized a quantitative research approach to collect data. The researcher prepared an online survey using google form. The survey dealt with the respondents' career choices and the third section evaluated the respondents' career development. It focused on determining the respondents' career choices in terms of personal reasons, social, family, and school factors wherein respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire was adapted from the study written by Arada et. al. (2015). In Part III, respondents determined their level of agreement regarding career development in terms of clarity, confidence, challenge, and change in one's career, using the same scale. It was derived from the study of Sweet et al. (2014). The contents of the instrument used in this study underwent rigorous verification and validation processes to ensure its reliability. The instrument was first examined and validated by a panel of experts in the field to ensure that it adequately measured the intended constructs. Reliability test of the questionnaires is indicated below:

Table 1

Reliability Test Result

Indicators	Cronbach Alpha	Remarks
Personal Reasons	0.925	Excellent
Social Factors	0.900	Excellent
Family Factors	0.902	Excellent
School Factors	0.911	Excellent
Clarity in one's career	0.929	Excellent
Confidence in one's career	0.942	Excellent
Challenge in one's career	0.926	Excellent
Change in one's career	0.901	Excellent

George and Mallery (2003) provide the following rules of thumb: “_ > .9 – Excellent, _ > .8 – Good, _ > .7 – Acceptable, _ > .6 – Questionable, _ > .5 – Poor, and _ < .5 – Unacceptable

The table showed that all sections of the instrument exhibited excellent levels of reliability. These results indicated that the instrument consistently measured the intended constructs and can be relied upon to provide accurate and consistent data. The Cronbach's alpha values suggested that the items in each section are interrelated and contribute to measuring the variables effectively. Thus, the reliability of the instrument strengthened the credibility and legitimacy of the research findings.

Data Gathering Procedure - The data gathering procedure in this study involved the collection of data from the respondents using a validated survey questionnaire with rating scales. The questionnaires were distributed to 500 Chinese vocational college students using Google Forms. The research instrument was designed with the help of a research adviser and field experts. After the tool was approved, the researcher obtained consent from the school heads of the higher vocational colleges involved. A detailed explanation of the research was provided, including the objectives and possible ethical considerations. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents upon approval. After collecting the responses, the researcher checked for missing responses and input the data into the SPSS software for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis - Quantitative data analysis was used in this study to interpret the data. This approach employed numerical data, making it applicable to other domains through analysis methods like regression models or probability distributions. Weighted mean and rank were calculated to determine the career choices and development among vocational college students. Pearson's r was used to test the significant relationships among variables work orientation, and job expectations. All statistical analyses and data processing were conducted using SPSS version 26, a widely used statistical software package.

Ethical Considerations - To safeguard the privacy of respondents, the researcher refrained from disclosing any individual identities. The researcher ensured confidentiality on personal interactions with the participants, respected their privacy and obtained consent before accessing any sensitive information. The analysis was conducted in a manner that will prioritize the well-being of the participants and ensure that their data will be accurately represented in the study. The researchers abstained from expressing personal viewpoints and solely present information and findings derived from the collected data. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and be informed that the survey will solely serve the purpose of this study. Furthermore, the study underwent a rigorous ethics review process and was granted approval.

3. Results & discussion

Table 2

Summary Table On Career Choices

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Personal Reasons	2.51	Agree	1.5
Social Factors	2.51	Agree	1.5
Family Factors	2.47	Disagree	4
School Factors	2.52	Agree	3
Composite Mean	2.50	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 presented the summarized results of career choices. According to the data, the respondents had a general agreement rating as evidenced by the composite mean of 2.50. Items 1 and 2, personal reasons and social factors, had the highest rank, with an equal weighted mean of 2.51. This was followed by Item 4, school factors, with a weighted mean of 2.52; and on the last rank, Item 3, family factors, with a weighted mean of 2.47 which an indicated a disagreement rating from the respondents. Conducting a self-evaluation of one's abilities and qualities may be key in deciding which paths to pursue, as it may ensure congruence between an individual's talents and their chosen job. Cultural norms and social values may establish a range of job options that are considered acceptable, shaping individuals' decisions in accordance with established customs, gender expectations, and community norms. Emotional support, advice, and familial influence may exert a significant impact on decision-making processes regarding certain professional pathways, either by providing encouragement or by applying pressure. Furthermore, associations with companies, internships, and meetings with industry experts may offer hands-on training and networking opportunities that improve their chances of finding employment. Emotional encouragement, guidance, and familial influence may significantly impact decision-making processes by either encouraging or pushing students towards particular career routes. Every factor may have a unique impact on creating career paths, underscoring the significance of comprehensive support and advice during the decision-making process.

Mahmud and Adnan (2023) asserted that professional self-efficacy refers to an individual's capacity to recognize opportunities and engage in organized career planning. Parental career behavior encompasses the provision of social support and active involvement by parents in guiding and assisting their children in making optimal career decisions that will ensure their future success. It also encompasses child-rearing approaches. Their study sought to establish the relationship between career self-worth and parental professional actions during the professional decision-making process of Community College learners. The results indicated a correlation between these two factors. The study suggested that effective undergraduate career preparation should be in sync with the support and activities offered by parents and institutions, which should be consistent and enduring. This will ensure that students feel self-assured when making decisions regarding their jobs and future prospects.

Table 3 summarized the results on respondents' career development. The composite mean of 2.50 showed a general agreement among the respondents, The first indicator, clarity in one's career, had a weighted mean of 2.52 ranking first among the four indicators. Ranking second was item 2, confidence in one's career, with a weighted mean of 2.50. The first 2 indicators showed an agreement among the respondents. On the other hand,

Item 3, challenge in ones' career and item 4, change in one's career, had weighted means of 2.48 and 2.49

Table 3*Summary on Respondents Career Development*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Clarity in one's career	2.52	Agree	1
Confidence in one's career	2.50	Agree	2
Challenge in ones' career	2.48	Disagree	3
Change in one's career	2.49	Disagree	4
Composite Mean	2.50	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Career development may be a constant and lifetime process that may involve managing one's education, job, recreational pursuits, and transitions to progress towards an individually defined and ever-changing desired future. Gaining extensive awareness of career development may be critical to professional advancement, success in one's work, and overall contentment in life. In a dynamic employment market, maintaining relevance requires continuous learning and professional growth. By understanding the fundamental concepts of professional development, individuals may discern the specific abilities that they must learn or enhance. This may assist the workforce in positioning themselves for raises, new responsibilities, and other career development. They have become more appealing prospects for employers who prioritize personnel dedicated to their professional advancement and progress.

Omar et al. (2023) conducted an empirical qualitative and longitudinal research study among technical undergraduates enrolled in diploma programs across several fields of study. The aim of this study was to address several concerns linked to graduates' readiness for the profession, specifically focusing on the absence of skills needed for employment. Enhancing graduates' employability skills has emerged as a vital priority in the current educational landscape. One strategy is to incorporate elements of soft skills into teaching and learning processes across the curriculum. The findings of employability skills were identified as being at a moderate level. The self-efficacy for professional advancement was moderately high. The demographic characteristics of gender and academic accomplishment did not have a significant impact on students' self-efficacy in job growth.

Table 4*Relationship Between Career Choice and Career Development*

Personal Reasons	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Clarity	.446	0.000	Highly Significant
Confidence	.484	0.000	Highly Significant
Challenge	.479	0.000	Highly Significant
Change	.472	0.000	Highly Significant
Social Factors			
Clarity	.407	0.000	Highly Significant
Confidence	.417	0.000	Highly Significant
Challenge	.416	0.000	Highly Significant
Change	.439	0.000	Highly Significant
Family Factors			
Clarity	.480	0.000	Highly Significant
Confidence	.469	0.000	Highly Significant
Challenge	.477	0.000	Highly Significant
Change	.497	0.000	Highly Significant
School Factors			
Clarity	.452	0.000	Highly Significant
Confidence	.493	0.000	Highly Significant
Challenge	.509	0.000	Highly Significant
Change	.493	0.000	Highly Significant

Table 4 presents the association between career choice and career development. It was observed that computed r-values were found to show a substantial direct and indirect connection, and the p-values that were generated were beneath the alpha thresholds. This suggested that there was a substantial association

between career choice and development and implied that the better the career choice is, the higher chances of career development there will be. Multiple aspects may differentiate career choice from career development, leading to major variations between the two areas of professional life. Career choice may refer to the initial decision of a profession or field of employment, whereas career development may involve an ongoing procedure of growth, education, and promotion within that selected field. Career choice may refer to the initial decision made frequently, just once, which is affected by immediate considerations and external forces. However, career development may be an ongoing and growing process motivated by one's own development, future targets, and continual learning.

Al Rinadra et al. (2023) contended that in the face of intensifying global competition, organizations must enhance their performance by employing highly skilled and informed personnel. Unfortunately, talent management, career development, and talent cultivation are frequently mishandled in businesses, particularly government agencies, resulting in a disconnect between success and efficiency. The literature research findings indicated that talent management encompasses the activities of identifying, recruiting, developing, and retaining individuals with the necessary qualifications to contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives. Career development facilitates the growth of employees' interests, demands, and career preferences, whereas talent development focuses on enhancing employee potential and capabilities.

Table 5
Proposed Comprehensive Career Guidance Action Plan for Chinese Vocational Students

Key Result Areas	Objective/s	Strategies	Success Indicators	Persons involved
I. Career Choices	1. To assist students in recognizing their strengths, weaknesses, inclinations, and values to make well-informed decisions on their career choices.	1. Facilitate seminars aimed at fostering students' reflections on their past experiences, achievements, and career objectives.	1. 90% of students are able to set job expectations which are realistic and aligned with their career goals.	
Personal Reasons	2. To offer extensive information regarding diverse professional pathways, economic landscapes, and expertise necessary for different types of jobs.	2. Organize excursions to nearby companies and job expos to familiarize students with diverse occupations and networking opportunities.	2. 90% of students are able to identify their strengths and weakness to prepare them as they enter the work force.	School Administrators Students, and parents
Social Factors Calling Family Factors	3. To establish a resilient support network that includes educators, families, professionals from the business community, and former students to provide guidance to students in advancing their careers.	3. Facilitate parental involvement by organizing informative seminars and workshops aimed at equipping them with the necessary tools to assist their children in achieving their career goals.	3. 90% of students are confident that they feel supported as they choose the career paths.	
School Factors				
II. Career Development	1. To furnish students with full understanding concerning career choices, employment markets, and specific skills necessary to pursue various occupations.	1. Employ psychometric assessments and career evaluation instruments to assist students in discerning their interests, skills, and vocational inclinations.	1.90% of students are willing to participate in counselling services to guide them in their goals and career pathways.	School Administrators and Students
2.1 Clarity on one's career	2. To provide students accurate and practical information on income, benefits job stability, and opportunities for career growth.	2. Create and provide vocational training programs that offer practical skills and practical training directly related to students' career choices.	2. 90% of students are motivated to engage sessions to learn about the workforce.	
2.2 Confidence on one's career			3. 90% of students are able to identify the motivators in order for them set their career pathways	
2.3 Challenge in one's career 2.4 Change in one's career	3. To promote interactions between students and professionals in their respective areas of interest to provide assistance, mentorship, and networking opportunities.	3. Implement mentorship initiatives to facilitate connections between students and seasoned experts in their chosen industries, thus providing them with valuable guidance and assistance.		

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Most of the respondents agreed on the indicators regarding career choices in terms of personal reasons, social, and school factors. There was a disagreement in terms of family factors. Most of the respondents agreed on indicators regarding career development in terms of clarity, and confidence and disagreed on indicators pertaining to challenge, and change in one's career. As to the relationship between career choice and career development, findings showed highly significant relationship. This implied that they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. A plan of action for comprehensive career guidance for Chinese vocational students was proposed. Vocational college officials may have the option to organize regular sessions that showcase guest speakers from various companies to engage students in conversations about job prospects, industry perspectives, and corporate trends. Vocational college administrators may arrange career expos to facilitate direct interactions between students and businesses, allowing them to gather information about job opportunities, salary estimates, and employment benefits. They may also provide crash courses on the crafting of compelling cover letters and resumes, coupled with tailored discussion regarding employment to train students on the fundamentals of employment. Vocational college directors may establish and maintain strong ties with a diverse range of industries to foster partnership and assist students in their employment prospects tied with the said organizations. Vocational College administrators may have the option of establishing a full resource center that is readily accessible to students. This resource center may include career guides, detailed descriptions of positions, reports on various industries, and factual information about different professions. The proposed plan of action for students' comprehensive career guidance may be executed and assessed for its efficacy. Future researchers may conduct research to monitor the progression of vocational students' career development across a specified period to offer valuable insights into the dynamic nature of career aspirations, choices, and progress, as well as the various elements that shape and affect these transformations.

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