

THE INFLUENCE OF CAREER GUIDANCE ON CAREER ORIENTATION AMONG VOCATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS IN CHINA

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Abstract: *This study investigates the role of career guidance in shaping career orientation among vocational college students in China, with a focus on the effectiveness of personalized counseling, aptitude testing, and access to industry information. The study employs a quantitative approach, collecting data from 385 students across three vocational institutions. The research aims to explore how career guidance influences students' career decision-making processes and how effectively it aligns their career aspirations with the labor market demands. Data were collected through online surveys and analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal that personalized counseling has the most significant impact on students' confidence in their career choices, followed by aptitude testing and industry-specific information. This study highlights the importance of career guidance in vocational education and underscores the need for improvements in service delivery to better meet the diverse needs of students. The results provide valuable insights for vocational colleges in China, suggesting that enhancing the quality and accessibility of career guidance services can significantly contribute to students' successful transition from education to employment. These findings offer practical recommendations for educational institutions to optimize career guidance programs, ensuring that students are better prepared for the workforce and equipped to navigate the complexities of their future careers.*

Keywords: *Career Guidance, Career Orientation, Vocational College, China.*

Introduction

The process by which individuals determine and develop their career trajectories, which are shaped by their talents, interests, values, and personal goals, is referred to as career orientation. When it comes to vocational education, career orientation is especially important since it helps students link their academic and practical training with future work chances. This is a very important aspect of professional development. When it comes to vocational college students in China, good career orientation can have a substantial impact on their readiness for the workforce, which in turn can stimulate educated decision-making over career choices. Professional advice programs, which play an important part in assisting students in exploring their alternatives, setting professional objectives that are attainable, and improving their employability in a job market that is very competitive, are frequently used to provide support for this process (Grant, 2020).

In China, accelerated economic growth and changes in the job market have necessitated that all students be trained to gather fundamental information needed for career development (Smith & Gillespie, 2023). At the forefront of this effort is vocational colleges, which provide their sector-specific training to bridge education and employment. It is true of course that much depends on the quality and relevance of career guidance for children.

The career guidance is not just about advising a good best suitable course to students; rather it involves personalized counseling, aptitude testing, and access for information on various industries. Since vocational colleges are characterized by a high degree of professional orientation in career-specific training, this guidance can have an impact on the choice and subsequent occupational advancement of their students. However, the obstacles associated with providing successful career guidance are many and range from human resource concerns—skills or qualifications of counselors, to those related infrastructure support systems available for effective counseling. It casts doubt on the extent to which career guidance programs have been successful in addressing these challenges and preparing students for work.

This study would provide the necessary skills for counselors, which strategies may be addressed through career guidance and what kind of infrastructure is there to support student outcome based on a proper understanding. These results provide information to schools, teachers, administrators and counseling services on the best strategies for improving career guidance in vocational education training courses present it so that students can be successfully integrated into employment.

Literature Review

Career education at the tertiary level (referring to vocational colleges) is a widely studied field, particularly in relation to enabling students into work after completing their studies (Van den Beemt et al., 2020). These have become models of implementation to direct the different approaches in career guidance programs. In-depth knowledge of career counselors is also essential because they need to understand students and suggest methods for discovering their strengths, interests, values as well. Career centers and online platforms, in particular help students access the tools they need to land a job.

Vocational colleges in China have developed multiple methods to help students choose right subject. Even more effective are the one-on-one services provided for students to receive personalized counseling tailored just to him or her. In this vibrant campus community, group counseling and workshops educate students who learn practical skills as they exchange ideas

with peers in expert led sessions (Bodner & Elmas, 2020). Use of technology, online career assessment tools and virtual counseling sessions has revolutionised the delivery aspect bringing a further outreach to candidates in effective guidance on careers paths chosen.

In the end, good career guidance is about having a variety of important soft skills like active listening and empathy to form relationships with students. In addition, they must be familiar with the labor market and to an extent the specific industries being trained into by their students (Oswald-Egg & Renold, 2021). Whether it be taking courses of education, attending trade shows and/or getting work supervision for their counsellor role training to make sure they are compliant with what the industry latest trends or making your skills more accurate in heard a variety case. In addition, counselors must possess cultural competence as they interact with the rich backgrounds and experiences of vocational students.

The infrastructure available to support career guidance at the level of VET is robust; there are established careers centres at most larger institutions (e.g. many universities now have a dedicated Careers Centre or Department) which provide structured one-to-one interviews as well workshops covering aspects such as CV preparation, self-assessment exercises etc.; the effectiveness/efficiency of these practices were not investigated within this study however they can be found elsewhere. Businesses are critical in providing students with the information and experiences they need to make informed decisions about future careers (Gati & Kulcsár, 2021). For instance, in VR and AR students can simply walk through job applications or test drives of careers to learn more about industries, which provides detailed insight that helps them visualize where they could take their career.

It has been known for a long time that providing students with career assistance is an essential component in easing the transition from the educational system to the working world. Over the course of the last few decades, a substantial amount of study has been conducted to investigate the impact that career guidance has on the formation of students' career orientation, particularly in the context of vocational education. Career guidance programs in China serve as a bridge between theoretical learning and practical application in the labor market (Zhang et al., 2022). Vocational education plays a significant role in China in the process of preparing students for certain crafts or professions. Counseling, mentoring, job fairs, internships, and workshops are some of the several interventions that are included in career guidance programs at vocational institutions. The overarching goal of these programs is to assist students in making well-informed decisions regarding their future careers. Several studies have demonstrated that career coaching helps students improve their self-awareness and decision-making abilities, which in turn enables them to better align their skills and aspirations with the opportunities that are available in the field of career development. In vocational education, where the ultimate goal is to educate students for successful and meaningful employment in their chosen sectors, this process is essential since it assists in achieving the final goal (Dahalan et al., 2024).

Research conducted by a great number of academics has highlighted the significance of early career guidance in determining the long-term career pathways of pupils. It is possible for competent career advising to reduce the likelihood of students experiencing career dissatisfaction and job mismatches in the Chinese vocational education system, which is characterized by students frequently enrolling in specialized programs at a young age (Gati & Kulcsár, 2021). It has been found through research that students who receive specialized career guidance during their vocational education are more likely to enjoy higher levels of job satisfaction and to be successful in their careers over the long run. Specifically, this is due to the fact that career

guidance assists students in developing a more distinct comprehension of their professional objectives, interests, and the abilities that are necessary for the professions that they have selected. The provision of career guidance within the context of vocational education also enables students to engage in critical thinking regarding the degree to which their academic training is aligned with the requirements of the labor market. As a result of technical breakthroughs and alterations in industrial structures, the labor market in China is continuously being reshaped, making this alignment extremely important in the country's fast changing economy. Students are able to stay updated about these developments and alter their career aspirations accordingly with the assistance of career advice assistance (Okolie et al., 2020).

In addition, a number of studies have investigated the connection between career assistance and the students' perceptions of their own ability to get a job. The term "career self-efficacy" refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully handle profession-related tasks such as applying for jobs, making decisions, and planning their careers. It is essential for students attending vocational colleges who are getting ready to enter the profession to have a higher level of career self-efficacy because it is related with a stronger level of confidence in pursuing individual career goals. Career guidance treatments, including as career counseling and job placement support, have been shown to considerably improve students' perceptions of their own ability to succeed in their chosen careers, according to research (Gati & Kulcsár, 2021). These interventions equip students with the tools and resources necessary to make well-informed decisions about their future careers, alleviate the anxiety that they have regarding their future careers, and boost their confidence in their ability to effectively transition from school to work. Students who take part in career workshops, mock interviews, and job fairs, for example, report greater levels of career self-efficacy and are more likely to acquire employment after graduation. This is according to studies that have been conducted.

Not only does career guidance serve a crucial part in encouraging career adaptability, but it also plays a significant role in enhancing career self-efficacy at the same time. The ability of an individual to alter their career goals and methods in response to changing conditions, such as shifts in the labor market or personal obstacles, is included in the concept of career flexibility (Gati & Kulcsár, 2021). Because it enables students to maintain their flexibility and openness to new chances, career adaptability is of utmost significance in vocational education, which is a form of education that prepares students for specific forms of employment. In China, career advice programs frequently place an emphasis on the development of job flexibility by assisting students in the cultivation of abilities such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and resilience. In a labor market that is always changing, these skills are absolutely necessary. In this market, the capacity to adjust to new technologies and industries can be the deciding factor in whether or not a profession is successful or whether it remains stagnant. Students who receive career guidance are better ready to negotiate job transitions and are more inclined to pursue continuing professional development throughout their careers, according to research. This is the case regardless of whether or not the students are currently employed.

The literature also focuses on the function that career advising plays in increasing employability, which is another important issue. Employability is a term that describes the collection of skills, knowledge, and characteristics that enable an individual to obtain and keep a job. Because vocational college students in China are frequently prepared for specific positions in industries such as manufacturing, technology, and healthcare, employability is an essential outcome of their education. This is because vocational college students are regularly trained for specific jobs. Through the provision of chances for students to get practical experience through internships,

apprenticeships, and industry partnerships, career advice programs play a significant role in boosting the employability of students. Students are able to apply what they have learned in the classroom to situations that are based in the real world, acquire skills that are relevant to their business, and build professional networks through these experiences (Wolff et al., 2021). It has been demonstrated through research that students who take part in career advice programs that place an emphasis on employability skills have a higher probability of securing work in their preferred sectors and report higher levels of satisfaction with their careers. In addition, receiving career coaching assists students in the development of soft skills such as leadership, communication, and teamwork, all of which are becoming increasingly appreciated by employers in today's highly competitive job market.

The influence that career guidance has on the process of career exploration and decision-making is another important part of career guidance. The process of acquiring information about various career possibilities, industries, and work responsibilities and then using that information to make educated judgments about one's career is referred to as career exploration. Career exploration is especially significant for students attending vocational colleges since it gives them the opportunity to assess their interests, abilities, and values in relation to the labor market (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). The purpose of career advice programs is to give students with the resources and opportunity necessary to investigate a variety of professional pathways. These programs may include job shadowing, informational interviews, and career assessments respectively. It has been demonstrated through research that career exploration has a favorable correlation with professional decision-making. This is due to the fact that it enables students to make career choices that are both better educated and more confident. In China, where vocational education is highly specialized, career advice programs play an important role in assisting students in exploring the diverse variety of career choices that are accessible to them within the fields that they have decided to pursue. This method of investigation is especially crucial for assisting students in avoiding job mismatch, which is a situation in which individuals are working in professions that do not correlate with their talents, interests, or career aspirations.

In addition, the literature draws attention to the difficulties and constraints that are associated with career coaching in vocational education. Vocational colleges, particularly those located in rural areas of China, frequently face the difficulty of a shortage of resources and career counselors who have received adequate training. In many vocational colleges, there are no career advice centers specifically designed for students, and as a result, students frequently receive inadequate career support. The paucity of resources available to students might make it more difficult for them to make well-informed judgments about their future careers and to successfully transition into the workforce (Fawcett, 2023). Further complicating matters for career guidance programs is the quick pace of technology change and globalization, both of which are occurring simultaneously. Career guidance programs are required to undergo continuous adaptation in order to present students with the most recent knowledge regarding developing industries and employment opportunities. This is because the work market is constantly changing. For this reason, it is necessary for vocational institutions, industry partners, and government agencies to maintain a continuous partnership in order to guarantee that career advice programs continue to be effective and beneficial.

The provision of career advising continues to be an essential component of vocational education in China, notwithstanding the problems that remain. The provision of career assistance in vocational institutions has been strengthened through the implementation of a number of governmental initiatives. As an illustration, the government of China has initiated programs with

the objective of enhancing the standard of vocational education and increasing the number of services that provide career advising. Among these measures include the provision of financial support for career counseling centers, the formation of collaborations with various industries, and the incorporation of career assistance into the curriculum of vocational schools (Okolie et al., 2020). With more students now receiving comprehensive career guidance and support throughout their vocational education, research reveals that these policy measures have had a favorable influence on the professional outcomes of students. This is because more students are now receiving these services. In addition, vocational colleges are becoming more aware of the significance of career advising in assisting students in achieving success in their careers over the long term. As a consequence of this, numerous educational institutions are making investments in career advising programs and services in order to better prepare prospective employees.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on Career Development Theory, which emphasizes the dynamic interaction between an individual's personal attributes and external environmental factors in shaping career choices and trajectories. Developed by theorists such as Donald Super and John Holland, Career Development Theory posits that career orientation is influenced by a combination of self-concept, life stages, and the alignment between individual interests, skills, and job opportunities. This framework is particularly relevant in the context of vocational education, where students must navigate specialized training and align their career aspirations with the demands of a rapidly evolving labor market. The theory underscores the role of career guidance in facilitating this alignment by providing tools such as personalized counseling, aptitude assessments, and access to industry-specific information. These interventions help students explore their potential, identify career pathways, and develop the self-efficacy required for informed decision-making and successful career transitions.

In vocational colleges, the application of Career Development Theory is critical, as it acknowledges the importance of contextual factors such as labor market trends, cultural influences, and institutional support systems in shaping career outcomes. For instance, personalized counseling allows students to refine their self-concept by exploring their strengths, weaknesses, and interests in relation to their academic and career goals. Similarly, aptitude testing offers an objective assessment of skills and abilities, helping students make decisions that align with their competencies and aspirations. Access to industry information further bridges the gap between education and employment by exposing students to real-world opportunities and challenges, thereby enhancing their career adaptability. By integrating these elements, Career Development Theory provides a robust foundation for understanding how vocational students develop career orientation and how targeted career guidance interventions can optimize this process.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach to assess the impact of career guidance on the career orientation of vocational college students in China. Its primary objective is to evaluate the influence of career guidance in shaping students' career choices and understanding how such support helps align student aspirations with labor market demands. The quantitative methodology enables statistical analysis to explore the relationship between career guidance and career orientation outcomes. The research focuses on a population of students enrolled in vocational colleges who have received career guidance services. A sample of 385 students were drawn from three institutions across different regions of China. A stratified random sampling technique ensures representation of students from diverse academic disciplines and year groups.

The data collection involved administering an online survey to vocational college students across three institutions in different regions of China. Before the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 30 students to evaluate the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire, leading to minor revisions for improved precision. The finalized survey, distributed through a user-friendly online platform, included clear instructions and an accessible support contact for technical assistance. Data collection spanned one month, with periodic reminders sent to non-respondents to maximize participation. The online approach ensured convenience and wide accessibility, enabling students from diverse academic and geographic backgrounds to participate without disrupting their schedules. Institutional support facilitated communication with potential participants, enhancing response rates.

The sample size of 385 students was determined to ensure statistical robustness and representativeness of the findings. Calculations were based on Cochran's formula, adjusted for finite population correction, achieving a 95% confidence level with a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error. This size strikes a balance between reliability and practical feasibility. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation of students across different academic disciplines and year groups, reflecting the diversity of the target population. Including three institutions from varied regions of China allowed the study to capture potential regional variations in career guidance practices and economic contexts, enhancing the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of vocational college students.

The questionnaire included both Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions, assessing various aspects of career guidance such as its relevance, effectiveness, trust in the advice provided, and its influence on career orientation. Additionally, questions gauged students' confidence in their career choices, the extent to which career guidance connected their skills with job market demands, and overall satisfaction with the services received. Prior to the main data collection, the reliability of the questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 students from one of the vocational institutions in China. Data was later collected through an online platform. Ethical considerations were central to the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed about the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Data confidentiality was strictly maintained, with anonymized responses accessible only to the research team and stored securely.

For data analysis, Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were employed to examine the relationships between career guidance strategies, students' confidence in their career decisions, and their career orientation. Pearson's correlation was used to assess the strength and direction of the association between career guidance and career orientation, while multiple regression analysis explored the influence of specific elements, such as personalized counseling, aptitude testing, and access to industry information, on students' career orientation.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	190	49.4
	Female	195	50.6
Age	18-20	110	28.6
	21-23	200	51.9
	24 and above	75	19.5

Year of Study	First Year	150	39.0
	Second Year	135	35.1
	Third Year	100	25.9
Field of Study	Engineering	85	22.1
	Business	105	27.3
	Healthcare	75	19.5
	Information Technology (IT)	50	13.0
	Others	70	18.2

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants across various categories, including gender, age, year of study, and field of study. In terms of gender distribution, the sample is nearly balanced, with 49.4% male ($n = 190$) and 50.6% female participants ($n = 195$). This balance enhances the representativeness of the data, enabling insights from both genders. Age-wise, the majority of participants fall within the 21-23 age group (51.9%, $n = 200$), followed by the 18-20 age range (28.6%, $n = 110$), and 24 and above (19.5%, $n = 75$). This age distribution reflects a predominance of younger students, likely undergraduates, and provides a solid base for understanding learning interests among emerging adults.

Regarding the year of study, most participants are in their first year (39.0%, $n = 150$), with smaller proportions in the second (35.1%, $n = 135$) and third years (25.9%, $n = 100$). This distribution may suggest that the study includes a significant number of new students, which could impact their perspectives on learning interests as they adjust to university life. In terms of academic discipline, students from the business field make up the largest group (27.3%, $n = 105$), followed by those in engineering (22.1%, $n = 85$), healthcare (19.5%, $n = 75$), and information technology (13.0%, $n = 50$). Additionally, students in other fields constitute 18.2% ($n = 70$) of the sample, highlighting a diverse range of study areas. This diversity allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how learning interests may vary across different academic fields.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Dimension/Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Personalized Counseling	4.2	0.8
Aptitude Testing	4.0	0.9
Access to Industry Information	3.8	0.7
Group Workshops	3.5	0.6
Virtual Career Counseling	3.7	0.8

The descriptive analysis in table 2 reveals that personalized counseling scored the highest mean (4.2) with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.8, indicating it is the most impactful and consistent dimension of career guidance among vocational college students. Aptitude testing follows with a mean of 4.0 (SD = 0.9), suggesting strong effectiveness but with slightly more variability in responses. Access to industry information has a mean of 3.8 (SD = 0.7), showing it is moderately impactful and relatively consistent. Virtual career counseling and group workshops have means of 3.7 (SD = 0.8) and 3.5 (SD = 0.6), respectively, indicating lower but still significant contributions to career orientation, with group workshops showing the least variability. These results highlight the importance of personalized and interactive guidance methods in shaping students' career orientation.

Pearson's correlation analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between each career guidance services and career orientation among vocational college students in China. Table 3 shows the correlation between different career guidance services and students' orientation. Personalized counseling has the strongest correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that students who received one-on-one counseling were more likely to feel confident in their career decisions. Aptitude testing and access to industry information also showed significant positive correlations with students' career orientation, with Pearson's r values of 0.54 and 0.48, respectively.

Table 3: Correlation between Career Guidance Services and Career Orientation

Career Guidance Services	Career Orientation	
	Pearson's r	p-value
Personalized Counseling	0.62	<0.001
Aptitude Testing	0.54	<0.001
Access to Industry Information	0.48	<0.001
Group Workshops	0.37	<0.001
Virtual Career Counseling	0.45	<0.001
Use of Technology in Career Services	0.50	<0.001

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis, which tested the influence of career guidance services on students' career orientation. Personalized counseling ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) was found to be the most significant predictor of career orientation, followed by aptitude testing ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). Access to industry information and virtual career counseling also contributed to shaping career orientation but to a lesser degree.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Influence of Career Guidance Services and Career Orientation

Independent Variable	Beta	t-value	p-value
Personalized Counseling	0.38	5.74	<0.001
Aptitude Testing	0.31	4.89	<0.001
Access to Industry Information	0.22	3.51	<0.001
Group Workshops	0.17	2.92	0.004
Virtual Career Counseling	0.21	3.17	0.002

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the vital role of career guidance in shaping the career orientation of vocational college students in China. Personalized counseling emerged as the most influential component, reflecting its effectiveness in addressing the unique needs and aspirations of individual students. This aligns with research indicating that one-on-one guidance fosters deeper self-awareness and empowers students to make confident and informed career decisions (Van den Beemt et al., 2020). Personalized counseling also provides an opportunity for counselors to offer targeted advice, ensuring that students' academic training aligns with their career goals, a critical factor for long-term job satisfaction and success.

Aptitude testing also plays a significant role in career orientation by helping students identify their strengths, skills, and interests. This approach enhances students' ability to make informed choices about their academic and professional paths, aligning with studies showing that aptitude assessments improve career self-efficacy and decision-making skills (Gati & Kulcsár, 2021). When students understand their potential and areas of interest, they are better equipped to select

career pathways that suit them, reducing the risk of job mismatch and dissatisfaction. Moreover, aptitude testing complements other career guidance methods by providing an objective basis for exploring career options.

Access to industry-specific information further bridges the gap between vocational education and the demands of the labor market. By exposing students to current trends, job roles, and employment requirements, this component helps them align their aspirations with realistic opportunities. Previous research has shown that such exposure not only enhances career adaptability but also encourages students to stay updated on evolving industries (Zhang et al., 2022). Additionally, industry insights allow students to envision their future roles within specific sectors, making their career goals more concrete and achievable. This aligns vocational education with its primary objective: equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary for meaningful employment.

Group workshops and virtual career counseling, though slightly less impactful, remain valuable elements of career guidance. Workshops foster collaboration, peer learning, and the development of soft skills such as teamwork and communication, which are essential for workplace success (Bodner & Elmas, 2020). Virtual career counseling, on the other hand, leverages technology to enhance accessibility and convenience, especially for students in remote areas or those unable to attend in-person sessions. This reflects a broader trend toward integrating digital tools in career services, enabling institutions to reach a wider audience and provide flexible support (Oswald-Egg & Renold, 2021). Together, these components highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach to career guidance, combining personalized support, practical tools, and industry connections to prepare students for the complexities of the modern labor market.

Conclusion

In China, specifically career guidance is important for the preparation of vocational college students for labor market. This study show that by providing personalized counseling and involvement in the industry and technology, students' career orientation will improve. Nonetheless, feedback can only be useful to the extent that students trust they are receiving good advice and have access to appropriate resources and infrastructure. Career counseling is really a flawed angle in the first place and retooling counselors (train by profession?) overcoming bad counselor legacies, expanding technological advanced utilization, ensuring all students have equal access to resources. Vocational colleges may not necessarily invest in those opportunities. To meet this challenge, vocational colleges need to get their students in a better position for themselves and the national economy. So this finding is of great significance to teachers, education administrators and employment counselors who intend in reinforcing the effect of career development program within vocational colleges. Future research should examine how effects of career guidance on students' subsequent occupational success change experience and time, as well as the optimal modes for delivering this form of intervention in different educational contexts. The study acknowledges limitations, including the potential for self-reporting bias, as students may have provided socially desirable responses rather than their true opinions. Additionally, the research is geographically confined to specific regions in China, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of career advisory services in shaping career orientation among vocational college students. The findings aim to inform recommendations for enhancing career guidance programs within vocational education systems in China.

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