

Study on Career Planning Ability Development for Vocational Students

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the current state of vocational career planning competence among secondary vocational students and the pathways to optimize it. By analyzing the primary issues faced by these students in the process of career planning, including ambiguous career awareness, a mismatch between career interests and actual abilities, and a lack of clear future career goals, this research further elucidates the influencing factors. The study identifies several ongoing problems within current secondary vocational education, such as insufficient career planning curriculum, weak career consciousness among students, and a lack of practical opportunities and resource support. The paper proposes strategies to enhance vocational career planning competence, including strengthening career planning courses and education, establishing personalized career guidance services, and increasing practical activities and social practice opportunities. The research concludes that through multi-dimensional educational reforms and practical support, the career planning competence of secondary vocational students can be effectively enhanced, thereby helping them make informed and rational career choices, thus fostering their professional development and social adaptability.

Keywords: Vocational Students; Career Planning; Career Awareness; Guidance

Introduction

With the continuous development of the socio-economic landscape, career planning has become an essential component of student education. For secondary vocational students, the unique nature of both the educational methods and content they receive renders career planning competence particularly crucial. In reality, many secondary vocational students face a series of challenges in their career planning processes—such as vague career awareness, a disjunction between their career interests and actual capabilities, and a lack of well-defined career goals. These issues not only impede their career choices but also hinder their professional growth and social adaptability. Moreover, due to the constraints of educational resources and the broader societal environment, these students often have limited exposure to the job market, leaving their career planning awareness and skills in dire need of enhancement. As such, the question of how to assist secondary vocational students in conducting scientific career planning, while boosting their career awareness and abilities, has become a pivotal issue in the ongoing reforms of secondary vocational education. This study seeks to analyze the current state of career planning among these students, investigate ways to optimize their career planning competence, and propose practical, feasible solutions, with the goal of offering theoretical support and practical guidance to educators and policymakers alike.

1. Characteristics of Career Planning Ability

1.1 Vague Career Awareness

A prevalent issue among secondary vocational students in the process of career planning is the ambiguity surrounding their career awareness. Due to limitations imposed by educational resources, practical experience, and societal perceptions, many students possess a superficial or distorted understanding of various professions. There is often a lack of in-depth understanding regarding labor market demands, industry development trends, and job requirements, which leads them to make misjudgments when selecting a career path, ultimately hindering their ability to make decisions conducive to their personal development. For some students, career awareness is shaped largely by societal stereotypes or subjective evaluations from others, without a comprehensive self-assessment of their interests, capabilities, and personalities.

Enhancing students' career awareness, helping them form objective and comprehensive views about careers, is a crucial step in improving their career planning competence^[1].

1.2 Mismatch Between Interests and Abilities

The mismatch between career interests and actual abilities represents another significant challenge in career planning for secondary vocational students. While many students may develop a strong interest in certain professions, they often discover a considerable gap between their abilities and the requirements of those careers when they try to engage in them practically. The reasons for this phenomenon are multifaceted, encompassing personal talents, educational backgrounds, and skill levels. Some students may idealize certain industries, neglecting the real challenges inherent in career progression. Others may lack a profound understanding of their own strengths and interests, leading them to pursue career goals that are misaligned with their actual abilities. Career planning should focus on assisting students in recognizing their advantages and limitations, striking a balance between their interests and abilities, and formulating a more realistic and achievable career development path.

1.3 Lack of Clear Career Goals

A significant number of secondary vocational students lack clear career goals in their planning, which results in confusion and a lack of direction in their future career development. The root cause of this phenomenon lies in the insufficient emphasis placed on goal-setting by students, often swayed by short-term benefits or external factors, and failing to thoroughly consider long-term career growth. Some students lack the ability to set goals, unable to find a balance between their interests, abilities, and market demand, leading to either unclear or overly vague objectives. Clearly defined career goals are foundational to career planning, and students should set specific, achievable career development goals based on their interests, abilities, and market demands, regularly adjusting and refining them to ensure the accuracy and sustainability of their career trajectory^[2].

2. Current Issues in Career Planning for Vocational Students

2.1 Lack of Career Education and Guidance

A prevalent issue among secondary vocational students in the domain of career planning is the absence of systematic education and guidance. While some schools have incorporated career planning into their curricula, the content often remains superficial, lacking both relevance and practicality. Many institutions face a shortage of specialized career planning educators and fail to offer personalized guidance for students. Consequently, when students attempt to navigate their career paths, they frequently rely on limited personal knowledge or external influences, without access to scientifically informed career planning advice. The absence of professional education and guidance results in students' inability to grasp the significance of career planning, leaving them directionless in their career development. Some schools also fail to provide an in-depth and comprehensive career planning curriculum, leaving students unable to systematically explore career awareness, skill development, and goal setting. There is an urgent need to enhance the depth and breadth of career planning education within secondary vocational institutions, improve the capacity of educators to offer career guidance, and provide more effective career planning support for students.

2.2 Weak Career Awareness

Another prominent issue is the insufficient career awareness among certain secondary vocational students, who lack profound understanding and reflection regarding their career development. Most students, upon entering the workforce, have not yet formed a clear career development plan and are instead primarily focused on their immediate learning tasks and short-term objectives. This phenomenon is not only related to the limitations of societal perceptions concerning the career development of vocational students, but also closely tied to the students' own lack of a long-term vision for their professional futures. Many vocational students perceive career development as merely the task of securing employment opportunities, neglecting the long-term and multifaceted nature of professional growth. Particularly when faced

with decisions about further education or employment, some students lack sufficient career planning awareness, often following trends or yielding to the opinions of others rather than making informed choices based on their interests, abilities, and the demands of the labor market. Cultivating students' career awareness and helping them establish clear career goals and development concepts is of paramount importance.

2.3 Lack of Practical Opportunities and Resources

In the process of career planning, secondary vocational students often face a shortage of practical opportunities and resource support. Despite the emphasis on skill training within vocational education, the limited collaboration between schools and industries means that students frequently miss out on relevant real-world work experience related to their fields of study. In many institutions, practical courses are inadequately structured, and the practical content is disconnected from market needs, failing to enhance students' vocational skills or workplace adaptability effectively. Furthermore, the limited cooperation between schools and businesses deprives students of authentic workplace exposure. In terms of resource support, some vocational schools lack in-depth partnerships with industry enterprises and fail to provide students with sufficient career development resources, such as industry seminars, vocational competitions, or internships. Without necessary external support, students' career development remains hindered, and their employment prospects remain narrow. It is crucial for schools to strengthen collaborations with businesses, expand students' practical opportunities, and provide greater career development resources to foster holistic student growth and career success^[2].

3. Strategies for Optimizing Career Planning for Vocational Students

3.1 Strengthening Career Planning Education

To enhance the career planning competence of secondary vocational students, it is essential to prioritize the strengthening of career planning courses and educational structures. Career planning education should not merely focus on the transmission of knowledge but must also adopt diverse teaching methods to help students comprehensively understand the significance of career planning and its practical applications. Vocational schools should incorporate additional career planning-related courses, designing a well-rounded curriculum that aligns with students' specialized fields and future developmental needs. The course content should encompass key areas such as career awareness, goal setting, skill requirements, and workplace adaptation, enabling students to gain a thorough understanding of the characteristics and development prospects of different professions. The teaching approach for career planning courses should emphasize interactivity and practical engagement, incorporating techniques like role-playing, case analyses, and simulated workplace scenarios, which serve to stimulate students' interest while fostering their practical application skills. Teacher training is equally pivotal. Vocational schools should regularly organize training programs to enhance teachers' career guidance abilities, improving their professional competence and mentoring techniques. Educators should combine practical insights with theoretical knowledge, guiding students through self-assessments and aiding in the creation of personalized career plans. Additionally, the integration of information technology tools, such as online courses and career planning platforms, should be employed to provide personalized and convenient learning channels, allowing students to access pertinent career development information and make more informed, precise decisions regarding their future career trajectories^[3].

3.2 Personalized Career Guidance System

The establishment of a personalized career guidance service system represents another crucial strategy for enhancing career planning competence among secondary vocational students. Every student possesses unique interests, strengths, and developmental potential, and as such, career planning must avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Vocational schools should offer tailored career guidance services that cater to the individual characteristics of each student. Through tools such as interest assessments and career personality evaluations, schools can help students gain deeper insights into their own interests, strengths, and areas for improvement, thereby facilitating the creation of a reasonable and customized career development pathway. Personalized career guidance should be seamlessly integrated into students' daily education. Teachers should not only focus on academic performance but should also seek to understand students' career interests and personal goals. Through regular counseling sessions and one-on-one discussions, teachers can assist students in adjusting their learning strategies to ensure

alignment between their academic achievements and career aspirations. Schools should also enrich students' access to diverse career development information by inviting industry experts and alumni to share their experiences, helping broaden students' perspectives and clarify their developmental directions. Furthermore, the establishment of dedicated career planning counseling centers, which provide comprehensive services such as job application guidance, interview training, and professional qualification exam coaching, can address students' career needs at various stages. By creating a well-rounded personalized career guidance system, students can receive more precise career planning support, positioning them to stand out in the competitive job market.

3.3 Practical Opportunities and Social Practice

Increasing practical components and social practice opportunities is a pivotal means of optimizing career planning competence among secondary vocational students. Career planning is not solely the acquisition of theoretical knowledge; it is equally dependent on hands-on experience and the accumulation of real-world social practice. Vocational education inherently emphasizes skill development, and practical engagement is an integral aspect of its educational framework. Schools should actively foster collaboration with enterprises and industries, establishing off-campus internship bases and offering various forms of social practice activities, providing students with authentic workplace experiences. During these practical sessions, students can directly engage with the day-to-day tasks, work environments, and professional demands of different careers, thus gaining a clearer understanding of their own professional positioning and future direction. Schools should also encourage students to participate in industry skill competitions, professional certification exams, and other related activities. These experiences not only enhance students' practical skills but also build their confidence and recognition regarding their career development. By offering an array of practical activities and social practice opportunities, students can better integrate theoretical knowledge with real-world application, ultimately improving their employability and professional adaptability. Schools should place particular emphasis on helping students accumulate social experience through volunteering, community work, and other forms of engagement, allowing them to appreciate the societal value and significance of various careers while fostering a sense of social responsibility and professional ethics. Through comprehensive practical support, students will continuously discover their career interests and strengths, further clarifying their career planning goals^[4].

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the career planning competence among secondary vocational students, unveiling a range of issues they face, such as ambiguous career awareness, a mismatch between career interests and actual abilities, and a lack of clear career goals for the future^[5]. These issues not only hinder students' correct understanding of career development but also restrict their ability to successfully initiate and sustain their professional trajectories in the long term. In response to these challenges, this study proposes three strategies for optimization: first, the enhancement of career planning courses and education. By implementing systematic career planning curricula, students will be better equipped to comprehend the characteristics, market demands, and development prospects of various professions, thereby improving their career awareness. Second, the establishment of a personalized career guidance service system. By providing tailored career guidance based on students' interests, strengths, and career objectives, individualized advice and counseling can be offered. Third, the expansion of practical components and social practice opportunities. Through collaboration with businesses, more internships and hands-on experiences can be provided to help students gain practical skills, thereby boosting their professional expertise and social adaptability. The implementation of these strategies will not only assist students in recognizing their interests and abilities but also provide substantial support for making scientifically sound and reasonable career choices. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of career planning education as a collaborative process, emphasizing the collective efforts of schools, families, and society to create a synergy that fosters the comprehensive enhancement of students' career planning capabilities. These reforms, if effectively implemented, can significantly promote the career development of secondary vocational students, laying a strong foundation for their future success in the workforce.

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