

Exploring the Reform of the University Vocational Education System in the New Era

Junxiang Li^{1*}, Jiayi Luo¹, Qi Liu¹

¹ Business School and School of Intelligent Emergency Management, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Email Address

lijx@usst.edu.cn (Junxiang Li)

*Correspondence: lijx@usst.edu.cn

Received: 19 November 2024; **Accepted:** 31 November 2024; **Published:** 17 December 2024

Abstract:

University students' career planning course is a very important course for the students, which has a certain guiding significance to choose their future career. And ignorance to the vocational education of today's colleges and universities will affect to a certain extent the state of the students entering the workplace for the first time. The existing problems of the vocational education system for the students in the new era are discussed and constructive suggestions for its reform are put forward in order to provide reference for the reform of contemporary vocational education system.

Keywords:

Vocational Education, Vocational Competence, Evaluation System, Reform in Education, College Education

1. Introduction

In recent years, the expansion of higher education in China has led to a significant challenge for university graduates and postgraduates, who are increasingly encountering difficulties in securing employment, while many enterprises report an inability to recruit suitable candidates. This structural mismatch is anticipated to persist for the foreseeable future. Within this context, the imperative to innovate practical teaching methodologies to enhance students' core competencies and overall quality has emerged as a critical issue in the ongoing educational reforms within higher education institutions. The ministry of education in China has issued the teaching requirements for career development and employment guidance courses for college students, which mandates that all general colleges and universities implement such courses to facilitate students' career development, promote self-awareness, and strengthen their connection to the labor market. The curriculum for these career development and employment guidance courses is explicitly outlined [1].

The introduction of career planning courses represents a significant strategy for higher education institutions to bolster students' core competencies, enabling them to effectively cultivate and allocate human resources while also facilitating rational

career planning [2]. This initiative is instrumental in assisting students with their individual career trajectories. Harvard University pioneered college career planning education in 1919, with a more systematic approach emerging in the 1960s. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan have increasingly recognized the importance of career development for college students and postgraduates, initiating career counseling courses that provide specialized guidance and systematically integrate academic learning with social learning experiences [3,4].

Career planning has emerged as a distinct area of study in China since its introduction in the mid-1990s. Numerous universities have integrated this subject into their departments of admission and employment, aiming to enhance students' understanding of employment opportunities and career development strategies [5]. However, the current implementation of career planning courses in Chinese higher education institutions is fraught with challenges, including inadequate qualifications of instructors, limited pedagogical approaches, a lack of relevance in course content, poorly structured teaching schedules, and insufficient systematization of the curriculum [6,7].

To address these issues, it is imperative to not only enhance awareness and foster a consensus regarding the institutional framework for career planning in universities but also to prioritize the reform of career planning education for both undergraduate and postgraduate students [8]. Such reform entails a systematic and purposeful transformation of outdated and irrational educational philosophies, methodologies, and content, in alignment with specific educational objectives and requirements.

Recent data indicates that the number of university graduates in the class of 2024 is projected to reach 11.79 million, representing an increase of 210,000 compared to the previous year in China. This trend suggests that the employment challenges faced by graduates in China are likely to intensify in the coming years. In light of the evolving landscape, career planning education for college students presents both significant opportunities and challenges. Therefore, it is crucial for higher education institutions to place greater emphasis on innovative career planning education. This includes the synchronous development of teaching content and methodologies to provide students with comprehensive employment information and strategies, thereby enhancing the overall employment rate of contemporary graduates and improving their core competencies, vocational skills, and holistic development.

The questionnaire survey conducted by Wisdom Recruitment between late March and mid-April 2024 [9], focusing on the graduating class of 2024 in China, is illustrated in Figure 1. The data indicates an increase in the percentage of recent graduates experiencing delays in securing employment and those engaging in freelancing, rising from 18.9% and 13.2% in 2023 to 19.1% and 13.7% in 2024, respectively. Concurrently, the proportion of fresh graduates opting to pursue further studies in China has risen from 4.9% in 2023 to 6.5% in 2024, coinciding with the ongoing expansion of postgraduate enrollment in universities. While unit employment remains the predominant career path, accounting for 55.5% of graduates, this figure represents a decline of 2 percentage points compared to the previous year. The transformation and upgrading of the domestic economy, along with the rapid emergence of new employment models, have contributed to a diversification of career choices among college graduates, with an increasing number of students seeking to realize their self-worth through delayed employment and freelancing opportunities.

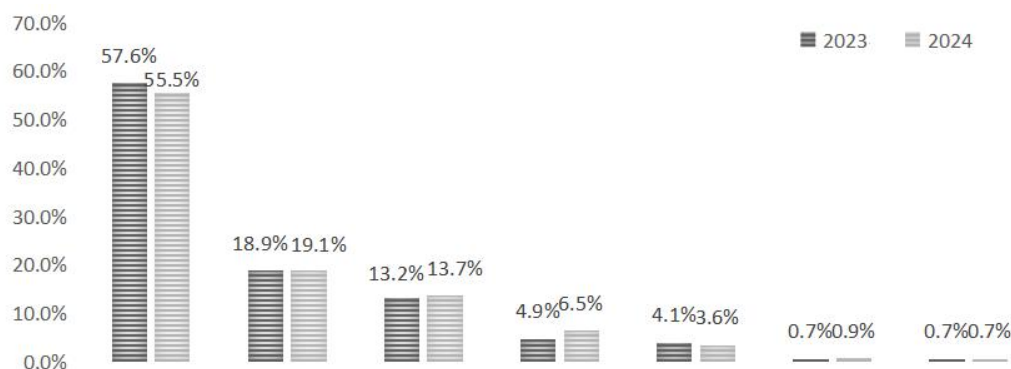


Figure 1. Destinations of university graduates from 2023 to 2024 in China.

Source: Wisdom Recruitment

2. Challenges in Career Planning Education at Colleges and Universities in the Contemporary Era

2.1. Insufficient personalized guidance in career education

Currently, the majority of colleges and universities mandate career planning as a compulsory course, typically delivered in large, combined classes without specialization in content. The lectures predominantly focus on theoretical aspects, addressing general employment-related issues. However, students in higher vocational colleges exhibit significant variability in their thought processes and job-seeking behaviors, influenced by their diverse experiences, educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic conditions. This diversity results in distinct challenges in career planning that are not adequately addressed by the conventional, rigid teaching methodologies employed. Consequently, students often lack a comprehensive understanding of their career trajectories and struggle to align with the evolving demands of society. Furthermore, the traditional "lecture-based" pedagogical approach leaves many students feeling disoriented when confronted with employment challenges.

2.2. Monotonous instructional methods with superficial content

At present, the predominant mode of instruction in career planning courses at most colleges and universities involves a teacher-centered approach, where students passively receive information. This singular instructional format is overly simplistic. The curriculum primarily encompasses theoretical topics, such as the definition of vocational education, strategies for selecting appropriate employers, and guidance on crafting resumes and preparing for interviews. Such broad and generalized content often results in a disconnect between theory and practice. Many instructors lack specialized training in career counseling and have not navigated the competitive job market themselves, leading to overly generalized content and a tendency towards formalism due to their own limitations. Consequently, students frequently find themselves unfamiliar with the practical realities of employment, and the instructional content often fails to resonate with actual circumstances, lacking hands-on experiential learning opportunities. As a result, many students struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into practical application during their initial job interviews, undermining the educational objective of enhancing their career planning capabilities.

2.3. Challenges in liberating students from their own perceptual constraints during lectures

Currently, a segment of college students experiences relatively low levels of life stress and exhibits minimal anxiety regarding future employment challenges. Students from affluent families may receive support to engage in travel or short-term relaxation periods. Conversely, recent graduates, confronted with a bleak employment landscape, may develop a complacent mindset, leading to a notable trend of protracted job searches among many students. The primary factor contributing to this phenomenon of slow employment is the prevalent pursuit of individual development, coupled with a lack of accurate understanding regarding career planning. Many students tend to overlook the significance of a well-structured career plan, which fails to align with the current demands of the labor market. This behavior often results in a deficiency of information regarding the allocation of social resources, causing students to become disoriented and neglectful of their personal development, ultimately hindering their future employability.

Additionally, another group of students, characterized by a strong desire to secure ideal employment prior to graduation, experiences pressure that complicates their ability to achieve their objectives expeditiously. This urgency often leads to a lack of clarity regarding their employment direction, as they may follow prevailing trends or peer influences without critical evaluation. Inaccurate self-assessment, coupled with insufficient information about potential employers and the job interview process, can result in many graduates encountering significant challenges upon entering the workforce. This initial frustration may prompt students to question their self-worth and career planning, which can adversely affect their future professional development.

2.4. Absence of a more effective evaluation system for career planning

Within the university environment, an evaluative framework exists that assesses students based on academic performance, awards, and leadership roles. However, this system is inadequate in capturing an individual's comprehensive capabilities. Consequently, many students are compelled to transition from a student-oriented mindset to a professional one in a relatively short timeframe as graduation approaches. The previous evaluative criteria become obsolete, leading some students to feel unrecognized by the external world, thereby creating a significant psychological gap. This dissonance further obscures their career planning, rendering it increasingly ambiguous.

Currently, the effectiveness of university education in facilitating students' vocational planning is predominantly theoretical, and its impact on actual employment outcomes remains unsatisfactory. Institutions of higher education often focus superficially on career planning without adequately prioritizing vocational education or providing the necessary support for students to secure employment. This has led to practices such as the signing of fraudulent labor contracts to artificially inflate graduate employment rates, exemplifying a trend of formalism. Furthermore, the vocational education system within colleges and universities is fundamentally flawed due to the absence of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for its implementation. Consequently, this allows for the establishment of goals that are disconnected from career relevance, thereby straying from the original intent of career planning education.

3. Proposed Initiatives for Enhancing Career Planning Education in Higher Education

In light of the increasing accessibility of higher education and the growing competitiveness of the job market, there is a heightened focus on career planning education for university students. Nevertheless, significant deficiencies persist within the current framework of career planning education. To optimize this educational approach for college students, it is essential to concentrate on five key areas: First, improving the quality and career guidance competencies of college faculty; Second, enhancing the vocational education curriculum to ensure that its content is both forward-looking and practical; Third, strengthening partnerships between academic institutions and the broader community to provide students with greater access to practical experiences and career resources; Fourth, establishing a scientifically sound and rational assessment system to assist students in identifying their interests and strengths; And fifth, promoting a robust understanding of vocational education principles, as illustrated in Figure 2.

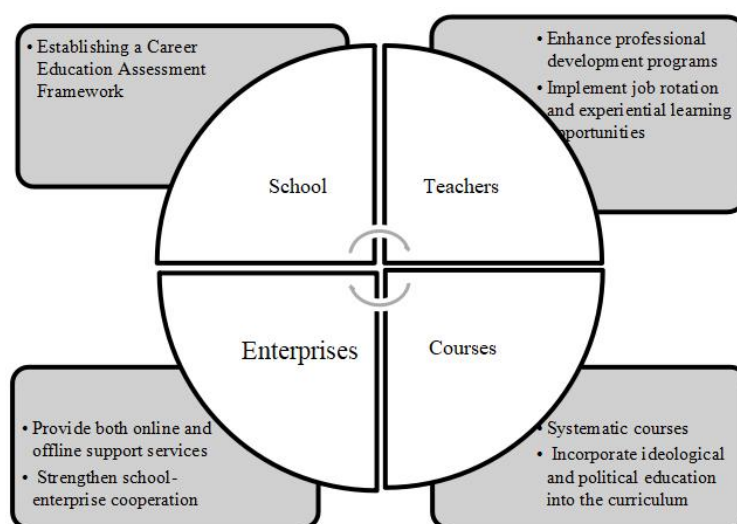


Figure 2. Enhancement of the vocational education framework within higher education institutions.

3.1. Enhancing the development of career education faculty in higher education institutions

Career education within colleges and universities represents a multifaceted discipline that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical application, professionalism, and comprehensiveness, necessitating high standards for educators in this field. This requirement implies that career educators must possess not only a robust theoretical foundation but also substantial practical experience. Currently, a significant proportion of career educators in higher education are often transitioned from other disciplines or serve in part-time, interdisciplinary roles. Many of these educators have not undergone systematic vocational training, lack the requisite vocational qualifications, and have insufficient exposure to enterprise-based training, resulting in a limited understanding of contemporary business environments and industry developments. Consequently, this deficiency hampers their ability to provide effective instruction and guidance. It is imperative to enhance the pedagogical competencies and practical skills of career educators through ongoing professional development, including regular training sessions, opportunities for knowledge

exchange, and practical experiences within enterprises. Establishing a structured training regimen for career educators will progressively elevate their professional capabilities, thereby enabling them to offer more specialized career guidance and services to students.

3.2. Refining the curriculum for career education

The curriculum for career education is characterized as a long-term, specialized, and systematic program that necessitates students' engagement with career-related courses annually. Career education should be viewed as a continuous process rather than a series of isolated offerings confined to the first year or pre-graduation period. Such fragmented approaches fail to establish a coherent and systematic framework for career education. Instead, the principles of career education should permeate the entire educational experience, effectively fostering students' career awareness, competencies, and behaviors. This approach aims to enhance students' understanding of career planning, thereby improving their overall competitiveness in the job market and facilitating successful employment outcomes upon graduation.

In terms of pedagogical strategies, instruction should be profession-oriented and delivered in small class settings or groups. The integration of career education with ideological and political education is essential, ensuring that the curriculum is tailored to meet the specific needs of students. Furthermore, the content of career education should extend beyond traditional theoretical frameworks to include practical simulations that reflect real-world job-seeking scenarios. This includes addressing potential challenges which students may encounter during interviews and providing guidance on navigating workplace conflicts. Additionally, it is crucial to instill a lifelong career planning mindset among students, helping them to define personal objectives and positioning vocational education as a guiding force for their future development.

Simultaneously, career education should be integrated with the objectives of civics and politics education. General secretary Xi Jinping in China has emphasized that university education must fundamentally prioritize the cultivation of moral character. Ideological and political education is intrinsically linked to the type of individuals what educational institutions aim to develop. Consequently, career education must align with the educational goals of ideological and political courses, ensuring that the objectives regarding the type of individuals to be nurtured are harmonized with career education. This integration is essential for achieving specialization, qualification, and diversification within career education at colleges and universities, thereby enhancing the capacity to produce talents that meet societal and enterprise needs.

3.3. Introducing a scientific career education assessment system

The establishment of a scientific career education assessment system is imperative. Such a system would facilitate students' understanding of their career orientations, interests, personality traits, abilities, and goals. Therefore, higher education institutions should implement comprehensive assessments of students' career-related factors across various academic years and semesters, providing professional guidance on interest alignment, potential exploration, skill enhancement, and career development. Utilizing the advantages of campus network platforms, a student career education assessment system should be developed, incorporating questionnaires, career counseling, and guidance based on students' online assessment outcomes. This approach aims to address the practical challenges faced by students, enabling tailored

follow-up and individualized online support. Such a system would assist students in selecting appropriate career development paths and scientifically planning their career trajectories, thereby mitigating confusion and complacency in their professional journeys and ensuring that their career planning is both scientific and professional.

Additionally, a novel value evaluation system should be introduced to assess individual students' vocational competencies. This system should encompass not only professional knowledge and skills but also vocational literacy, creativity, teamwork, and other relevant dimensions. While professional knowledge and skills form the

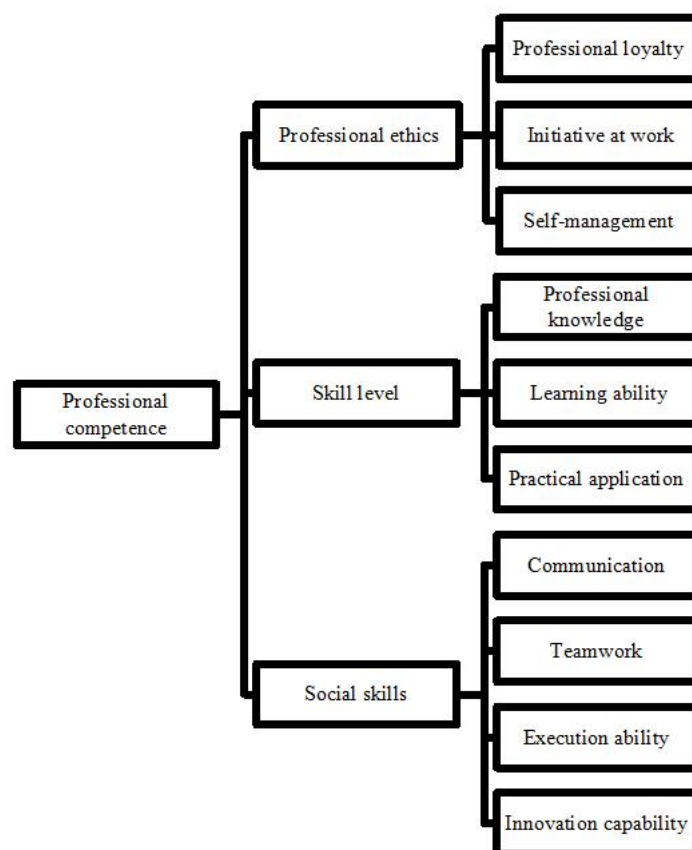


Figure 3. Vocational Competence Evaluation System.

foundation for engaging in vocational activities, professionalism pertains to students' behavioral norms and ethical standards within the workplace. Moreover, innovative and teamwork abilities, which are increasingly valued in contemporary work environments, play a crucial role in determining students' capacity for ongoing development and adaptability to changes in their future careers. The consideration of career competencies, encompassing work ethics, skill levels, and social competencies is delineated as illustrated in Figure 3.

3.4. Developing a career education service platform

A career education service platform is categorized into two components: an online service platform and an offline service platform. The online service platform serves as a pivotal product of the digital age, primarily characterized by its ability to provide immediate career counseling services and facilitate extensive sharing of informational resources. This platform not only consistently updates and disseminates critical information regarding career development, including policy guidance and legal regulations, but also leverages the advantages of the Internet and new media

technologies. Such capabilities effectively mitigate the constraints associated with offline education, particularly in terms of scheduling and resource distribution.

The online service platform offers students an expansive environment for autonomous learning through the implementation of self-study network course modules. Additionally, the platform's functionality for reproducing classroom instruction online enables real-time transmission and synchronization of offline teaching materials, thereby ensuring a cohesive learning experience. Furthermore, the establishment of an online interface for teacher-student interaction facilitates online question-and-answer sessions, personalized counseling, and individualized career planning guidance, significantly enhancing the interactivity and relevance of the educational experience.

Utilizing contemporary media formats such as live streaming and short videos, the platform also fosters connections between students and enterprises, thereby enriching career experiences and exchanges. This initiative provides students with valuable opportunities to gain insights into the workplace environment and to strategically plan their career trajectories. Concurrently, the WeChat public account serves as a vital channel for disseminating information, regularly providing updates on job-seeking opportunities, employment policies, and pertinent legal regulations, thus ensuring that students receive timely and comprehensive employment information services.

Moreover, the introduction of an advanced career assessment system, grounded in multidisciplinary theories encompassing psychology and vocational science, enables the platform to conduct thorough and professional evaluations of students' interests, personalities, temperaments, vocational abilities, and career inclinations. This process aids students in achieving a deeper understanding of themselves and in attaining more precise career positioning, thereby establishing a robust foundation for their future career development.

In the context of offline career education services, it is imperative for colleges and universities to proactively establish practical platforms that facilitate hands-on experiences for students. Institutions should encourage student engagement in a diverse array of career-oriented activities, ensuring a robust connection between academic learning and practical workplace experiences. Concurrently, it is essential to enhance mechanisms for school-enterprise collaboration, fortifying strategic alliances with businesses to jointly explore innovative models and pathways for cooperation. This approach aims to provide students with a broader spectrum of practical learning experiences and internship opportunities that closely mirror real-world conditions.

A critical component of this initiative involves the establishment of a well-defined tripartite agreement among the school, enterprise, and student, which should meticulously outline the specifics of the internship, including job and skill requirements, as well as the assessment and evaluation framework. Such agreements are vital for ensuring the orderly execution of internships and for the continuous improvement of their quality.

Furthermore, institutions should actively seek to incorporate distinguished industry talent as mentors, who can periodically visit campuses to share insights on the latest industry trends, job market demands, strategies for career goal setting, and analyses of post-graduation employment landscapes. This engagement is intended to broaden students' perspectives, clarify their career trajectories, and enhance their capabilities in career planning and employment competitiveness.

It is crucial that students' career practice activities are closely aligned with societal and enterprise needs, thereby providing them with exposure to authentic work environments and the challenges they may encounter in their professional lives. The educational model that emphasizes the integration of industry and education, alongside school-enterprise cooperation, not only enhances the overall quality and employability of students but also supplies enterprises with a skilled workforce that meets market demands, thereby fostering a mutually beneficial relationship among educational institutions, students, and businesses.

3.5. Transforming traditional paradigms and emphasizing career education planning in higher education institutions

The transformation of traditional paradigms and the prioritization of vocational education within colleges and universities represent a crucial strategy for addressing the demands of economic and social advancement, as well as for enhancing national competitiveness. Vocational education for university students holds significant implications for higher education institutions, the students themselves, and society at large.

Firstly, vocational education aligns with the fundamental responsibilities of educators. The primary role of a teacher encompasses not only the dissemination of knowledge but also the cultivation of appropriate ideological frameworks that contribute to the long-term development of students. Career planning courses for college students are integral to shaping their worldviews, life perspectives, and value systems.

Secondly, vocational education in universities plays a vital role in facilitating graduate employment. Traditional vocational education programs often remain confined to theoretical knowledge, which can create a disconnect between students and the realities of the workforce. This disconnect may lead students to perceive the theoretical constructs presented in their studies as reflective of an idealized society, rather than the complexities of the real world. Consequently, when students transition into the workforce, they may experience a dissonance between their educational experiences and the practical demands of their careers. The establishment of a robust evaluation system within career planning programs can help mitigate these discrepancies. Furthermore, vocational education emphasizes the importance of linking career planning courses to real-world contexts, encouraging students to develop their future aspirations through a pragmatic lens.

Thirdly, vocational education for university students has proven effective in increasing the employment rates of recent graduates and in producing skilled professionals for society. Currently, China is at a pivotal juncture in the development of a modern vocational education system and the promotion of a skill-oriented society, facing the significant challenge of converting its demographic dividend into a talent dividend. As a critical component of the national education framework and human resource development, vocational education bears the essential responsibility of nurturing and delivering high-quality, skilled, and diverse talent to support economic and social progress. During this crucial phase of vocational education development, it is imperative to gradually establish a distinctive ideological education system characterized by collaborative construction and timely feedback, thereby steering vocational education in a constructive direction and laying a solid foundation for talent cultivation.

4. Conclusions

The advent of artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and big data in the contemporary era has generated significant opportunities for societal advancement. However, it has also presented numerous challenges. The impact on vocational education within colleges and universities has been profound, necessitating urgent reforms to the vocational education system. This paper examines the current state of the vocational education system and proposes several reform measures, aiming to offer valuable insights for the ongoing development and enhancement of vocational education in higher education institutions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This work was funded by the 2022 Industry and University Cooperation Collaborative Education Project of Ministry of Education (220501791121846), the 2022 Shangli Chenxi Social Science Special Key Project of USST (22SLCX-ZD-009), the 2024 Undergraduate Key Teaching Research and Reform Project of USST (JGXM202401), and the Graduate Teaching Construction Project of USST (SZ202403).

References

- [1] Seo, W.; Lee C. Why Do Vocational High School Students Opt for College? *Education Sciences*, 2024,14(5), 534.
- [2] Yu, H.X. Research on Multimedia Teaching and Teaching Reform Innovation of Accounting Major in Higher Vocational Colleges under the Background of Big Data and Internet of Things. *Wireless Communications and Mobile Computing*, 2022, 2022: 1158647.
- [3] Chen, J.; Pastore, F. Dynamics of returns to vocational education in China: 2010-2017. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 2024, 11(1), 118.
- [4] Billett, S.; Choy, S.; Le, A.H.; Hodge, S. Vocational education teachers: perspectives on the standing of their educational sector and how it might be improved. *International Journal of Training Research*, 2023, 21(1), 2081240.
- [5] Nicole, T. Destinations after higher education non-completion: the role of social background and pre-tertiary vocational qualifications. *Empirical Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 2024,16(1), 12-18.
- [6] Alice, A. "Business without social responsibility is business without morality": employer engagement in upper secondary technical and vocational education and training schools in Ghana. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 2023,75(2), 391-415.
- [7] Andrea, V.; Rajasekhar, D. Who participates in vocational education and training in India? An analysis of socio-economic determinants. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 2023, 75(5), 890-909.

- [8] Leonetti, C.T.; Lindberg, H.; Schwake, D.O.; Cotter, R.L. A call to assess the impacts of course-based undergraduate research experiences for career and technical education, allied health, and underrepresented students at community colleges. *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 2023, 22(1), 34-42.
- [9] Liu, C.L.; Dai, L. Construction and Research of Career Education System in Vocational Colleges. *Teaching of Forestry Region*, 2024, 06, 56-59.



© 2022 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)