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A Study on Influencing Factors and Optimization Strategies for Academic Choices of Secondary Vocational School Students: A Perspective Based on Social Ecological System Theory

Ze Huai

Abstract: In China, the vocational education college entrance examination system is being progressively implemented, industry-education integration is continuing to deepen, and the dual pathways—advancement to higher education and direct employment—for secondary vocational education students are being steadily refined. Consequently, students now enjoy increasingly diverse academic options; however, issues such as passive compliance and a lack of scientific planning remain prevalent, posing practical bottlenecks that constrain the high-quality development of secondary vocational education. Grounded in the core perspective of social ecosystem theory, and integrating insights from rational choice theory, career development theory, and related research findings, this study systematically examines the influencing factors of academic choices among secondary vocational students across four dimensions—individual, family, school, and societal—analyzes the interaction mechanisms among these factors, and constructs an ecosystem model for students' academic choices. The study identifies multiple challenges in current academic decision-making: at the individual level, students often exhibit ambiguous self-positioning and insufficient academic self-efficacy; at the family level, there is pronounced disparity in social capital, alongside coexisting economic constraints and cognitive biases; at the school level, vocational guidance systems remain underdeveloped, and school-enterprise partnerships often exist merely as formalities; at the societal level, there are skewed value orientations and uneven regional development in industry-education integration. Building on these findings, this study proposes targeted optimization strategies from the four aforementioned dimensions—students, families, schools, and society—aiming to provide practical references for the reform of secondary vocational education and the academic development of its students.

Keywords: secondary vocational students; academic choices; social ecosystem theory; influencing factors; optimization strategies

I. Introduction

Vocational education is tasked with cultivating technically skilled professionals and constitutes a vital component in building a strong educational nation. For a considerable period, vocational education in China has faced challenges in student recruitment; students in secondary vocational schools have generally lacked initiative in selecting academic paths and have also lacked scientific planning—factors that have significantly hindered the

development of vocational education[1].

With the implementation and advancement of the vocational education college entrance examination system and the deepening integration of industry and education, both academic advancement and employment pathways for secondary vocational education have become increasingly accessible, offering students a wider array of academic options. However, phenomena such as blind conformity, passive decision-making, and a lack of long-term planning remain prevalent; these issues not only diminish students' commitment to their studies during their time in school but also exert a direct negative impact on their future career development.

Academic choices for secondary vocational students are not simple personal decisions; rather, they are shaped by the combined effects of numerous factors. These include parents 'lack of endorsement of vocational education, students' ambiguous self-positioning, insufficient academic guidance provided by schools, and skewed value orientations at the societal level. The interplay and compounding of these factors make it difficult for students to make well-considered and appropriate academic choices. How to help secondary vocational students identify a direction that suits their individual needs while also supporting their long-term development constitutes a pressing practical challenge in current vocational education reforms.

Given the above background, this study primarily focuses on the following questions: (1) What factors influence the academic choices of secondary vocational school students, and how do these factors interact systematically? (2) What are the intrinsic logical relationships among these different factors? (3) How can a multidimensional collaborative mechanism be constructed to support students in making informed academic choices?

This study identifies the influencing factors affecting academic choices among secondary vocational school students from four perspectives—individual, family, school, and societal—and proposes corresponding optimization strategies, thereby providing a reference for the reform of secondary vocational education and talent cultivation initiatives.

II. Current Status of Academic Choices

Secondary vocational education (referred to as "secondary vocational education") refers to the provision of 2–3 years of vocational knowledge and skills training for junior high school graduates, aiming to cultivate technically skilled personnel who meet the frontline needs of production, construction, management, and service sectors; this model serves the dual purpose of providing employment-oriented outcomes while offering pathways for further academic advancement.

The development of secondary vocational education in China has progressed along two key trajectories. The vocational education college entrance examination system has established a vertical mobility pathway connecting secondary vocational education, higher vocational education, and undergraduate education, thereby enhancing the social recognition of vocational education; meanwhile, the deepening of industry-education integration policies has continuously improved the alignment between secondary vocational program offerings and industrial demands, further broadening students' career development pathways.

However, challenges such as difficult student recruitment and retention in secondary vocational schools have not been fundamentally addressed. In recent years, although the enrollment scale in secondary vocational schools has shown some recovery, the quality of student applicants and the proportion of students who proactively make career choices remain relatively low. The root cause lies in the insufficient recognition of vocational education among students and their parents, coupled with a lack of scientific guidance during the academic choice-making process. Scholars have examined the issue of vocational education selection from multiple perspectives; for instance, some studies, from the standpoint of labor market segmentation, argue that family economic conditions

and professional networks directly influence students 'choice of academic majors and their subsequent educational pathways, thereby giving rise to pronounced social stratification. Wang Haonan observed that parents' educational choices are, in essence, vocational choices, and that factors such as employment prospects, sociocultural context, and school quality collectively shape parental attitudes [2]. Numerous studies have confirmed that psychological factors—such as self-efficacy, interest, and achievement goals—play pivotal roles in academic choice-making. Specifically, academic self-efficacy indirectly influences academic performance and satisfaction through mediating mechanisms like learning engagement and learning-related emotions; students with a well-developed sense of self-identity are more likely to make appropriate vocational choices [3]. Research by Hu Shu et al. demonstrates that fostering professional interest and providing career guidance in secondary vocational schools have a direct impact on students' vocational choices, with learning motivation serving as a mediator between vocational preparation and vocational choice. Ma Xiaoting et al. found that, against the backdrop of economic differentiation and cultural transformation in rural households, there has been a shift toward vocational-oriented educational choices; Yu Yun further pointed out that institutional segmentation within the labor market—including perceptions of skills, skill acquisition processes, skill certification mechanisms, and skill protection systems—constitutes the fundamental institutional barrier to vocational education selection.

A review of existing literature reveals that most studies have only examined the influencing factors of academic choice from a single dimension, and overall, these studies still exhibit several limitations. First, there is a lack of systematicity, with insufficient integrated analysis of multidimensional influencing factors. Second, existing research has not sufficiently explored the interactions among these factors or their relative weights. Finally, such studies have paid inadequate attention to secondary vocational education, as most existing findings focus on general high schools or the broader educational domain. This study adopts a systematic approach, spanning from micro to macro levels, to analyze these influencing factors and propose corresponding optimization strategies, aiming to address the aforementioned research gaps.

III. Analysis of Factors Influencing Academic Choices of Secondary Vocational School Students

3.1 Individual Factors

Personal factors constitute the fundamental prerequisite for academic choices among secondary vocational school students, directly determining their agency in making these choices and their suitability for those choices. This influence is primarily manifested in three aspects—cognitive level, interests and strengths, and competency traits—and serves as the foundation upon which all external factors exert their effects.

3.1.1 Self-Positioning

Self-positioning is the core factor influencing academic choices among secondary vocational school students. These students are in the midst of adolescence, and their self-awareness is still developing; their understanding of vocational education, their perception of specific majors, and their plans for future development all directly influence their final selection outcomes. According to research findings, students with relatively clear self-positioning are better able to make rational choices regarding their major and career direction—based on their learning capabilities and developmental needs, and in conjunction with pathways such as vocational education college entrance examinations and skill enhancement programs—thereby achieving greater academic progress. Conversely, some students hold biased perceptions of the value of vocational education; they are easily influenced by the stereotype that "vocational education is only for those with poor academic performance," which leads to a lack of confidence in their learning abilities and a view of vocational education as a secondary option. Such students often lack proactive thinking when selecting a major, instead following the crowd without considering their personal circumstances; consequently, they frequently experience diminished motivation to learn and feel

uncertain about their future development. In addition, the trade-off between educational costs and benefits also affects the academic choices of secondary vocational school students. Some students place greater emphasis on short-term economic returns, favoring majors that offer rapid employment prospects and stable starting salaries, while paying relatively little attention to long-term academic advancement and career development.

3.1.2 Interests

Interest serves as the intrinsic motivation for vocational secondary school students to make academic choices. The core objective of vocational education is to cultivate practical skills; however, whether students can persist in learning these skills—and whether they can acquire them in depth and thoroughly—depends crucially on their level of interest. Relevant research has shown that vocational students who harbor a strong interest in their chosen field are more inclined to devote time and effort to mastering specific skills; they actively participate in practical training sessions and skill competitions, achieve superior academic performance, are more willing to invest their time within their specialized domain, and are better positioned to develop their core competitive advantages. For instance, students with strong hands-on abilities and a preference for disassembly and assembly tend to choose highly practical majors such as new energy vehicle inspection and maintenance, or industrial robot applications; students with exceptional social skills and patience are better suited for service-oriented majors like early childhood care or nursing; and students with a keen artistic sensibility often gravitate toward majors that combine technical skill with creativity, such as digital media or traditional Chinese pastry arts. Conversely, if a student lacks genuine interest in their chosen major and enrolls merely due to peer recommendations or because the major is currently popular, they are more likely to develop aversion to learning, skip classes, and in severe cases, abandon their studies altogether—making this one of the primary reasons why some vocational students discontinue their education.

3.1.3 Competency Traits

Students 'competency profiles directly determine the suitability of their academic choices. The competency requirements for different majors in secondary vocational education vary significantly; traits such as hands-on skills, logical thinking, and communication skills can directly influence students' adaptability in their specialized studies as well as their subsequent development potential [4]. Students with strong hands-on skills often hold an advantage in practice-intensive majors such as mechanical manufacturing and automotive repair; those with clear logical thinking are better suited for fields emphasizing technological research, application, and debugging, such as big data technology applications and intelligent device operation and maintenance; while students with outstanding communication skills are more likely to secure growth opportunities in majors like e-commerce and tourism services.

A student's academic foundation and their ability to handle pressure also influence their career choices. Students with a weaker academic foundation and lower stress tolerance tend to avoid highly challenging majors, opting instead for fields with lower entry barriers and less academic pressure; in contrast, students with strong learning abilities are more likely to choose majors that offer promising prospects for further education and significant opportunities for skill development.

3.2 Family Factors

The family, serving as a crucial environment for the development of secondary vocational school students, exerts a direct and profound influence on their academic choices; this influence is often subtle yet pervasive, persisting throughout their entire development process.

3.2.1 Family Social Capital

Family social capital constrains students 'academic choices and development. This constraining effect manifests in two core dimensions: professional network resources and economic capital. Together, these dimensions determine the acquisition of information, the availability of resources, and the selection of developmental pathways for students' academic decisions, thereby constituting a critical external constraint on the academic choices of secondary vocational school students. Families with professional network resources within relevant industries can provide students with more specialized information, internship opportunities, and employment channels; such families tend to guide their students toward majors aligned with these professional networks, thereby facilitating their subsequent employment prospects. For instance, students whose family members work in the construction industry are more likely to choose majors related to construction engineering, leveraging their family's professional networks to secure additional learning and employment opportunities. In contrast, families lacking such professional networks often struggle to offer students guidance on major selection that aligns with industry realities, making students more susceptible to making uninformed choices due to information asymmetry [5].

At the same time, the learning process entails certain implicit costs, such as additional expenditures on professional training consumables, preparation costs for skill competitions, and training fees for professional certification exams; likewise, pathways for academic advancement—such as preparing for the vocational education college entrance examination or accessing high-quality off-campus training bases—also require certain financial support. Students from economically advantaged families can avoid short-term financial pressures, enabling them to choose interdisciplinary majors that demand significant investment but offer high growth potential; they also have the freedom to participate in activities that further their development, such as skill competitions and vocational education exam preparation, thereby broadening their career trajectories. In contrast, students from relatively economically disadvantaged families, who prioritize rapid employment and the establishment of a stable income stream, are more likely to be guided toward choosing majors with low entry barriers, minimal implicit costs, and quick employability. Due to financial constraints, such students may actively avoid high-cost majors or even forgo development pathways requiring additional investment—such as skill competitions or vocational education exam preparation—thereby facing significantly narrower options for academic selection and limited developmental potential.

3.2.2 Family Atmosphere

The family environment exerts a significant influence on the career choices of secondary vocational school students. A positive family environment can guide students to make career choices that better align with their personal development [6]. This influence is primarily mediated through the transmission of family educational values, the quality of parent-child communication, and the extent of emotional support; it shapes students' academic confidence, their mindset when making decisions, and their tendencies toward academic selection, thereby providing crucial emotional support for secondary vocational school students to make rational career choices.

Families that place importance on vocational education and adhere to scientific educational principles will proactively challenge the stereotype that "attending secondary vocational school offers no future," instead positively conveying the value and developmental prospects of vocational education. This approach helps students build confidence in their learning journey, enabling them to make long-term career plans based on their personal interests and capabilities when choosing a major—rather than being driven solely by the short-term goal of "quick employment." Effective parent-child communication allows parents to promptly understand their child's interests, strengths, learning abilities, and career aspirations. Armed with this insight, parents can offer practical career

advice tailored to the student's circumstances, while respecting the student's autonomy to prevent them from choosing a major they are uninterested in due to parental dictation. Conversely, in families lacking such communication, parents may make choices based solely on their own experience or prevailing employment trends, disregarding the student's personal preferences—a practice that can ultimately lead to a lack of motivation in their studies.

Furthermore, a harmonious family environment can provide students with ample emotional support, alleviating their anxiety and sense of uncertainty when making academic choices. This enables students to confidently explore suitable professional directions and consider alternative pathways to further education, such as vocational college entrance examinations. In contrast, students from families characterized by strained relationships and a lack of care and support may experience significant psychological pressure. Such pressure can hinder them from calmly assessing their personal needs and evaluating the suitability of different majors; consequently, they may tend to make hasty or perfunctory choices, or even, in an attempt to quickly escape their family environment, blindly opt for majors promising rapid employment opportunities—thereby completely disregarding the alignment between their personal development goals and their chosen majors.

3.3 School-related factors

As the primary setting where secondary vocational students receive education, schools play a direct guiding role in shaping their academic perceptions and choices; they also serve as an important bridge connecting students with society. The school environment, the influence of teachers, and the influence of peers can directly affect students 'choices, and these factors are also crucial for ensuring students' academic development.

3.3.1 School Atmosphere

The educational climate within a campus exerts a direct influence on students 'academic perspectives. A campus culture that emphasizes skill development, encourages innovation, and demonstrates genuine care for students can strengthen students' sense of belonging and boost their motivation to learn. Such an environment helps them rediscover the value of vocational education, dispel the stereotype that "only those with poor academic performance should pursue vocational education," and enable them to make more proactive and rational choices regarding their academic paths. Conversely, in the absence of a positive learning atmosphere—where practical skill training becomes merely a formality and teacher-student interaction is limited—students are highly susceptible to experiencing academic disorientation. In such cases, these students often follow the lead of others when selecting a major, making it difficult for them to make informed decisions based on their own circumstances. Furthermore, a robust campus environment characterized by skill competitions, industry-academia collaborative training programs, and an active focus on post-secondary preparation can subtly shape students' selection tendencies. Students in such settings tend to place greater emphasis on the opportunities for skill enhancement and the potential for further academic advancement within a major; consequently, they proactively gravitate toward interdisciplinary majors that align with industrial integration needs or those offering superior prospects for higher education, gradually establishing clear academic and career development goals.

3.3.2 Influence of Teachers

Teachers play a pivotal guiding role in the academic major selection process of secondary vocational students; their professional competence, teaching attitude, and career guidance capabilities all directly influence students 'final choices and judgments. Specialized subject teachers, leveraging their industry experience and accumulated professional knowledge, can clearly explain the learning content, skill requirements, and industrial development prospects of various majors to students. This enables them to help students objectively assess the suitability of different majors, thereby addressing any gaps in their understanding of professional options. Class advisors, on

the other hand, possess a deeper understanding of students' learning capacities, interests, strengths, and personality traits; consequently, they can offer more personalized recommendations regarding major selection and career development paths, guiding students with ambiguous self-positioning to identify their appropriate direction. Furthermore, the professional experience and practical skills of "dual-qualified" teachers allow students to gain a more intuitive grasp of the actual demands of relevant occupations, which in turn stimulates their interest in pursuing these fields. The encouragement and positive guidance provided by teachers can also significantly bolster students 'confidence in their learning, enabling them to formulate long-term development plans—such as pursuing the vocational education college entrance examination or engaging in skill enhancement—when making their academic choices. Conversely, if teachers lack professional career guidance capabilities or fail to provide adequate guidance regarding students' choices, students may easily make blind decisions, making it difficult for them to make judgments that align with both their personal development and the needs of the industry.

3.3.3 Peer Influence

Most secondary vocational school students are between 15 and 18 years old and are in puberty—a critical period of rapid physical and psychological change—during which peer relationships play a vital role in their development[7].

Peer influence refers to the emotional, informational, and instrumental support that individuals of similar or comparable age and social status obtain during interactions [8]. Compared to parents and teachers, peers—due to their equal status and shared experiences—are more likely to establish emotional resonance.

When peers around a student tend to choose interdisciplinary majors that align with industrial integration trends, or majors with strong prospects for further academic advancement, or actively participate in skill training programs and preparation for vocational education college entrance examinations, this can encourage the student to proactively explore such majors and their development pathways. Through mutual exchange and encouragement, the student may clarify their own career choices. Peers also share information about specific majors, practical training experiences, and insights into further education opportunities, thereby bridging information gaps in their understanding of different academic fields. This fosters a more comprehensive grasp of the realities of various majors, enabling the student to make more targeted academic decisions. Moreover, positive peer support can provide emotional reassurance, alleviating the student's academic anxiety during the decision-making process. Conversely, if the peer group generally lacks motivation for academic pursuits and prioritizes short-term employment over long-term development, the student may be influenced by this group, leading them to blindly pursue "easy employment" options while neglecting the alignment between their personal interests, capabilities, and the chosen major—potentially resulting in suboptimal academic choices.

3.4 Social Factors

The social environment constitutes the overarching context for academic choices made by secondary vocational students. By influencing decisions made by individuals, their families, and their schools, the social environment exerts an indirect effect on these academic choices, thereby shaping the overall trends in such selections. In other words, the choices of secondary vocational students are not isolated; rather, they are closely intertwined with the broader social environment.

3.4.1 Background of Industry-Education Integration

With the advancement of the digital and intelligent era, the pace of industrial transformation has accelerated, making traditional single-skilled occupations increasingly susceptible to replacement. When choosing a career path, secondary vocational students now place greater emphasis on whether their chosen field belongs to a "sunrise industry," whether it offers sustainable long-term growth, and whether it possesses potential for further evolution;

they are no longer content merely with "being able to secure a job." Instead, they prioritize the "future prospects" of their chosen profession, rather than focusing solely on short-term employment opportunities. Industrial convergence has led secondary vocational students to make more forward-looking, diversified, competency-driven, and long-term strategic choices in their academic pursuits—shifting from passive adaptation to proactive planning for their professional development. This convergence has also fostered cross-sector integration within traditional industries, such as automotive + electronics, manufacturing + intelligent technologies, agriculture + e-commerce, and services + digital technologies. Consequently, secondary vocational students are no longer limited to single-skilled specialties; they are increasingly inclined toward interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral programs, including new energy vehicles, intelligent device operations, cross-border e-commerce, and smart healthcare and wellness. Their career selection is thus evolving from a focus on "single industries" to "cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary" paths.

While industry-education integration is advancing rapidly, it has also exerted tangible influences on the academic choices of secondary vocational students. On one hand, the pace of this integration is swift, and professional technical skills are being updated frequently. However, some secondary vocational schools—constrained by limitations in teaching staff, practical training facilities, and funding—fail to keep pace with industrial development in upgrading their academic programs; consequently, the interdisciplinary majors they offer often diverge from actual industrial demands. Even if students select such integrated programs, they may still struggle to acquire cutting-edge skills that align with job requirements, easily encountering the dilemma of "choosing an integrated major yet finding it difficult to meet industrial needs." This, in turn, increases the cost of trial and error in their academic decision-making. On the other hand, the development of industry-education integration varies significantly across different regions. In grassroots areas such as counties and townships, industries remain predominantly based on traditional sectors, leaving interdisciplinary professionals with very limited employment opportunities locally. Even after completing their studies, these students face the practical challenge of "having no viable career prospects locally, yet encountering barriers to securing employment in other regions." This situation leads some students and their families to adopt a wait-and-see approach toward integrated academic programs, which directly impacts their final decisions regarding academic path selection.

3.4.2 Incentives for Enterprise Participation

As the primary drivers of industrial development, enterprises currently demonstrate a strong willingness to participate in vocational education training programs. They serve as a crucial external force in guiding secondary vocational students 'academic choices and professional development; within the context of industry-education integration, they further act as a key bridge connecting educational institutions with industrial demands. Many enterprises—characterized by sufficient economic strength, promising growth prospects, advanced equipment, and modernized management—have fully recognized that human resource development is a core strategy for sustaining their long-term growth momentum. Such enterprises provide clear guidance for the academic development of secondary vocational students, encouraging them to prioritize the acquisition of skills required by the industry during their specialized studies. This approach also compels students, at the stage of academic selection, to consider both corporate job requirements and their own career development plans. This guidance facilitates a shift in students' academic choices—from merely "selecting a major" to "choosing a career track and defining their professional path" —ensuring that their final decisions align more closely with the actual needs of society and industry.

At the same time, the utilitarian nature and uneven distribution of corporate participation in vocational education have also exerted negative constraints on the academic choices of secondary vocational school students.

First, for some enterprises, the primary objective of participating in school-enterprise cooperation is to secure low-cost labor, rather than genuinely cultivating skilled talent.

IV. Interaction Effects Among the Factors

The academic choices of secondary vocational school students result from the interplay of multiple factors: personal factors serve as the foundation and prerequisite, the realization of which requires support from family, school, and society; family factors provide both economic and cultural constraints as well as opportunities for empowerment; school factors influence these choices through educational practices; and societal factors establish macro-level boundaries and opportunities.

At the micro level, self-positioning and personal interests influence students 'willingness to choose specific academic majors through the mediating role of academic self-efficacy. The clearer a student's self-awareness and the more precisely they identify their interests, the higher their academic self-efficacy tends to be [9]. At the meso level, family educational values and family social capital together constitute the family support system. Family economic capital directly determines whether a student has the means to pursue a major characterized by high investment and high growth potential; meanwhile, the supportive educational environment within schools and the academic guidance provided by teachers can, to some extent, compensate for deficiencies in family-level support. At the macro level, societal value orientations, industry demands, and policy support indirectly influence students' academic choices through pathways such as the extent to which enterprises participate in vocational education, the allocation of school resources, and the prevailing societal discourse. The advancement of industry-education integration has opened up new opportunities for students, whereas the current uneven development of regional industries presents practical constraints.

Based on existing research, the factors influencing academic choices among secondary vocational school students can be broadly categorized into three levels. The first level comprises the decisive factors, primarily the student's self-positioning and academic self-efficacy. Whether a student possesses a clear self-awareness and recognizes their own capabilities directly determines their proactive approach to academic selection and the degree of suitability of their choices. The second level consists of key factors, encompassing family social capital and school career guidance. The family's economic foundation and network resources directly constrain the range of options available to the student; meanwhile, professional guidance provided by the school, the expectations set by teachers, and the overall campus environment collectively influence the student's assessment of the value of vocational education and their evaluation of their own capabilities. The third level comprises contextual factors, including societal value orientations, industry development trends, and relevant policy support. These factors do not directly affect the selection process itself; instead, they exert indirect influence through mechanisms such as reshaping the perceptions of students and their parents, optimizing the allocation of school resources, and shaping the level of corporate engagement in vocational education.

From an ecological perspective, an ideal academic choice environment for secondary vocational students should constitute an organic system characterized by four-dimensional interaction and hierarchical progression. For individual students, clear self-awareness, well-defined interest orientations, and moderate academic self-efficacy serve as the foundation for making appropriate choices. At the family level, parents should develop a correct understanding of vocational education, maintain effective communication with their children, and provide ample emotional and financial support. As the primary entity for implementing educational initiatives, schools should establish a scientific vocational guidance framework, foster a positive campus atmosphere, equip themselves with a sufficient number of dual-qualified teachers, and develop practical platforms for industry-education integration. Within the broader societal context, it is essential to cultivate a cultural environment that

respects vocational skills, secure supportive policy measures for industry-education integration, and encourage enterprises to actively participate in talent cultivation processes. Only by enabling these four dimensions to interact synergistically can a comprehensive ecosystem be established—one that empowers students to make scientific, proactive, and well-matched academic choices.

V. Problem Analysis and Countermeasures/Suggestions

5.1 Key Current Issues

Based on the foregoing analysis, the issue of academic choice among secondary vocational students is not attributable to a single factor; rather, it stems from multiple interrelated dimensions—individual, familial, institutional, and societal—each exerting a reciprocal influence. From the student's perspective, there is a widespread phenomenon of ambiguous self-positioning, skewed perceptions of the value of vocational education, generally low academic self-efficacy, modest expectations regarding their studies in secondary vocational education, and insufficient identification of personal interests; consequently, their choices are often made passively and blindly. The impact of family background varies significantly; families from different social contexts provide vastly different amounts of information, resources, and support, and this disparity in social capital directly constrains the range of options available to some students. Furthermore, inadequate parent-child communication, parents' low level of endorsement of vocational education, and considerable financial pressures faced by some families often compel many students to forgo high-investment, high-potential majors or pathways to further education. At the institutional level, support systems also exhibit notable shortcomings: vocational guidance lacks a coherent framework, specialized career planning curricula and qualified faculty are scarce, the campus cultural environment is underdeveloped, and many school-enterprise partnerships remain superficial, failing to provide students with authentic professional experiences. From a broader societal standpoint, vocational education has yet to overcome the stereotype of being "low-end and low-quality," and its value orientation remains skewed; moreover, the integration of industry and education varies unevenly across different regions, leaving students in grassroots communities often ill-equipped for their chosen careers, while corporate engagement in vocational education varies considerably in intensity.

5.2 Multi-dimensional Policy Recommendations

5.2.1 Student Level

Enhance career planning education. At the beginning of vocational secondary school enrollment, systematically implement a three-phase career education program—comprising self-awareness, career awareness, and decision-making skills—to help students achieve clear self-positioning and develop personalized career plans. Strengthen the cultivation of academic self-efficacy. By designing progressive learning tasks, providing timely feedback, and establishing role models for learning, students' recognition of their own learning capabilities will be enhanced, thereby reinforcing their determination and commitment to their chosen major. Create opportunities for interest exploration. Establish platforms such as major exploration weeks, industry awareness lectures, and skill demonstration activities, enabling students to discover and validate their interests through practical experiences, ensuring that their major selection is based on comprehensive experiential knowledge.

5.2.2 Family Level

Enhance parents 'understanding of vocational education. Regularly host thematic lectures on the development prospects of vocational education and the growth of skilled talents, inviting distinguished alumni, corporate representatives, and policy makers to participate, thereby dispelling parents' stereotypes about vocational

education. Strengthen home-school communication and collaboration. Establish a mechanism for parental involvement in career planning guidance, where schools periodically report to parents on students' interests, performance, and academic progress; parents, in turn, promptly discuss their career expectations with their children, fostering a synergistic support framework between families and schools. Refine economic support policies. For students facing financial difficulties, alleviate their economic constraints through scholarships, grants, and free training programs, ensuring they have access to high-value development pathways—such as participating in skill competitions or preparing for further education—thereby helping them break free from the poverty trap.

5.2.3 School Level

Establish a systematic career guidance framework. Equip dedicated career guidance faculty, offer compulsory courses such as "Career Planning" and "Professional Competence," and integrate career guidance elements into homeroom teacher duties and teaching practices, thereby creating a comprehensive, multi-dimensional guidance network. Foster a positive campus culture. Through skill competitions, school-enterprise practical training programs, and academic preparation activities, cultivate a campus environment that values skills, encourages development, and cares for students, allowing students to benefit from subtle, positive influences within this setting [10]. Deepen the integration of industry and education. Establish stable mechanisms for school-enterprise cooperation, inviting enterprises to participate in curriculum design, practical training guidance, and employment placement services, enabling students to experience professional requirements in authentic work environments. Enhance teachers 'career guidance capabilities. Through the cultivation of dual-qualified teachers, enterprise internships, and specialized professional training, improve teachers' understanding of industry trends, job market demands, and student individual characteristics, thereby transforming them into compelling career guidance advisors.

5.2.4 Social Level

Cultivate a social culture that respects vocational skills. Through media outreach, policy guidance, and exemplary models, foster societal perceptions that "skills can change one's destiny" and that "the craftsman spirit deserves respect," thereby enhancing the public image of vocational education. Promote balanced regional development of industry-education integration. Strengthen policy support for vocational education in grassroots regions, encourage enterprises to participate in local vocational education initiatives, and establish specialized training systems that align with regional industrial needs, ensuring that students from diverse regions have access to comparable development opportunities. Optimize the institutional environment of the labor market. By reforming employment systems, refining skill assessment mechanisms, and establishing career progression pathways for skilled professionals, eliminate market discrimination against vocational education graduates and reinforce confidence in the long-term benefits of vocational choices. Refine the vocational education college entrance examination system. Further optimize the selection mechanisms, admission quotas, and program offerings of this examination system, ensuring it serves as an active choice rather than a passive fallback option, thereby providing clear developmental pathways for students who aspire to further their education.

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