

Research on the Developmental Characteristics of Career Values among Post-00s Higher Vocational Students in the New Era: An Empirical Analysis Based on Higher Vocational Colleges in Shenzhen

Nan Zhou, Kui Luo*

Undergraduate Education College, Shenzhen Polytechnic University, Shenzhen 518055, Guangdong, China

*Corresponding author: Kui Luo, luokui@szpu.edu.cn

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Abstract

This study surveyed 528 post-00s students from three higher vocational colleges in Shenzhen using a revised “Career Values Questionnaire for Higher Vocational Students” and conducted statistical analysis with SPSS 26.0. The findings reveal that the career values of post-00s higher vocational students in Shenzhen exhibit characteristics of “enterprising pragmatism,” with “personal skill development” and “salary and benefits” jointly constituting the core driving forces. In terms of career evaluation criteria, “corporate innovation atmosphere” and “fair competition mechanisms” significantly surpass traditional concepts in importance. Career orientation demonstrates a clear regional retention tendency and industry foresight, with “staying in Shenzhen and the Greater Bay Area for development” and “engaging in strategic emerging industries” emerging as mainstream choices. The study indicates that the regional innovation ecosystem significantly shapes career values, necessitating the establishment of a collaborative guidance system involving higher vocational institutions, the government, and enterprises.

Keywords

Career values; Higher vocational students; Influencing factors; Post-00s

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1. Introduction

With the accelerated pace of China’s industrial upgrading, the quality of cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talent has garnered increasing attention. According to 2023 data from the Ministry of Education, the “post-

00s” generation comprises over 90% of the total student population in higher vocational colleges nationwide. Their career values will directly impact the stability and quality of the future industrial talent force. As the core engine of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay

Area, Shenzhen, with its unique innovation environment, industrial structure, and urban culture, provides an ideal sample for studying the career values of young people.

Current research on the career values of college students exhibits three main shortcomings. For instance, a tendency to treat college students as a homogeneous group, neglecting the specific characteristics of higher vocational students, a lack of in-depth analysis of the “post-00s” as a distinct generational cohort, insufficient attention paid to the shaping influence of regional cultural and economic contexts on value formation. To address these gaps, this study focuses on “post-00s” students in Shenzhen’s higher vocational colleges, aiming to systematically examine: first, the structural characteristics of this group’s career values; second, the influence of demographic variables on these values; and third, educational countermeasures based on the empirical findings.

2. Literature review and research framework

2.1. Theoretical evolution of career values

Research on career values originated with Super’s theory of work values, which defined career values as the work-related goals pursued by individuals ^[1]. Subsequently, Elizur proposed a dichotomy between instrumental and affective values, while Schwartz expanded the research perspective through cultural value dimensions ^[2]. In domestic research, the three-dimensional model developed by Ling et al. has been the most influential, encompassing the factors of prestige, stability (welfare), and development ^[3]. These theoretical achievements provide an important measurement foundation for this study.

2.2. Group characteristics of “post-00s” higher vocational students

Existing research points to three distinctive characteristics of “post-00s” higher vocational students:

- (1) Their cognitive style as “digital natives” leads to a high dependence on the internet for information acquisition and social interaction patterns ^[4];
- (2) They exhibit a value orientation where pragmatism and idealism coexist; they care about material security but also value self-actualization ^[5];

- (3) They show high sensitivity to the regional economic environment, with their career choices often closely linked to local industrial development ^[6].

2.3. Construction of the analytical framework

Based on the literature review, this study constructs an analytical framework comprising three dimensions: career value goals (integrating stability and development factors), career value evaluation criteria (emphasizing modern organizational characteristics), and career choice orientation (reflecting regional and contemporary influences). This framework retains the measurement strengths of classical theories while also accommodating the regional characteristics of Shenzhen and the group characteristics of the “post-00s” generation.

3. Research design

3.1. Research subjects and sampling procedure

This study employed a stratified random sampling method. Between October and December 2023, three higher vocational colleges in Shenzhen, each with distinct specializations (one excelling in electronic information, one focusing on intelligent manufacturing, and one characterized by modern service industries), were selected. Approximately 187 students were randomly selected from the second- and third-year “post-00s” students in each institution. A total of 560 questionnaires were distributed. After screening out invalid responses (e.g., incomplete or patterned answers), 528 valid questionnaires were obtained, yielding an effective response rate of 94.3%. The specific sample structure is presented in **Table 1**.

3.2. Research instrument and data processing strategy

This study utilized a self-developed “Career Values Questionnaire for Vocational College Students.” The development process was as follows: Initially, based on Ling’s scale framework and incorporating relevant scales from recent scholarly research ^[7-9], combined with interview results from 20 students and 8 corporate HR professionals, a pool of initial items was generated. This was followed by an expert review involving

three specialists (CVI = 0.92) and a pilot test with 150 participants. Through item analysis and exploratory factor analysis, the final scale comprising 30 items was established.

The formal scale consists of three dimensions: Value Goals (10 items, $\alpha = 0.86$), Value Evaluation (10 items, $\alpha = 0.84$), and Value Orientation (10 items, $\alpha =$

0.82). The overall scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated satisfactory model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.78$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.058). Data processing was performed using SPSS 26.0, primarily involving descriptive statistics, t-tests, and one-way analysis of variance, with the significance level set at $P < 0.05$.

Table 1. Distribution of demographic characteristics of the survey sample (n = 528)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Valid percentage (%)
Gender	Male	285	54.0
	Female	243	46.0
Place of origin	Shenzhen Hukou	122	23.1
	Guangdong Province (non-Shenzhen)	201	38.1
	Outside Guangdong Province	205	38.8
Family background	Parents with entrepreneurial experience	158	29.9
	Parents without entrepreneurial experience	370	70.1
Field of study	Electronic information	174	33.0
	Intelligent manufacturing	137	25.9
	Modern service industries	217	41.1

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and rankings for dimensions of career values (n = 528)

Dimension	Specific indicator	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Rank
Career value goals	Personal skill development	4.68	0.62	1
	Salary and benefits	4.63	0.65	2
	Acquiring cutting-edge industry knowledge	4.59	0.66	3
	Work-life balance	4.38	0.76	4
	Job stability	4.12	0.83	5
	Contributing to society	3.96	0.86	6
Career value evaluation	Corporate innovation atmosphere	4.55	0.67	1
	Fair competition and promotion mechanisms	4.52	0.69	2
	Corporate development prospects	4.47	0.71	3
	Flat organizational structure	4.40	0.73	4
	Harmonious interpersonal relationships	4.22	0.78	5
Career value orientation	Staying in Shenzhen/GBA for development	4.28	0.80	1
	Engaging in strategic emerging industries	4.48	0.66	2
	Prioritizing leading technology companies	4.25	0.77	3
	Flexible employment/freelancing	3.81	0.94	4
	Entrepreneurship	3.65	1.03	5

4. Findings and analysis

4.1. Description of overall characteristics of career values

Descriptive statistics were conducted on the three dimensions of career values and their core indicators, with the results presented in **Table 2**. The data clearly reveals the “enterprising pragmatism” structure of the career values among Shenzhen’s post-00s higher vocational students.

Regarding career value goals, a dual-core driven pattern of “development” and “security” is evident. “Personal skill development” ($M = 4.68$) and “Salary and benefits” ($M = 4.63$) ranked highest, with very close scores. This indicates that while they possess a strong willingness for self-investment and growth, they are also unequivocal in their pursuit of material returns, forming a rational and pragmatic mindset of “trading competence for remuneration.” “Acquiring cutting-edge industry knowledge” ($M = 4.59$) follows closely, reflecting their awareness of and proactive adaptation to technological iteration. Although “Job stability” ($M = 4.12$) remains valued, its relatively lower ranking suggests that within Shenzhen’s dynamic market, students’ perception of “stability” has shifted from seeking “institutional shelter” to relying on “skill preservation” (keeping skills fresh and relevant).

In terms of career value evaluation, the demand for a positive “soft environment” and “procedural justice” is remarkably high. “Corporate innovation atmosphere” ($M = 4.55$) and “Fair competition and promotion mechanisms” ($M = 4.52$) emerged as the most important evaluation criteria, significantly surpassing traditional factors like “Harmonious interpersonal relationships” ($M = 4.22$). This profoundly indicates that Shenzhen’s innovation culture has been internalized as a core benchmark in their career selection; they desire to work in a vibrant, rule-based environment where talent is valued.

For career value orientation, a clear regional affinity and industry insight are demonstrated. The intention to “Stay in Shenzhen and the Greater Bay Area for development” ($M = 4.28$) is clear, attracted by the powerful industrial clusters and the city’s open character. Simultaneously, they show a significantly stronger preference for “Engaging in strategic emerging industries” ($M = 4.48$) compared to other sectors, which

aligns closely with Shenzhen’s “20+8” industrial policy direction, demonstrating the rationality and foresight in their career choices. A certain level of acceptance towards “Flexible employment/Freelancing” ($M = 3.81$) also reflects the trend of diversified employment forms in the digital economy era.

4.2. Examination of group differences in career values

To explore the influence of demographic variables, tests for significant differences were conducted. Regarding differences based on place of origin, one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in “Entrepreneurship tendency” ($F = 8.15, P < 0.001$) and “Importance attached to Salary and benefits” ($F = 5.89, P < 0.01$). Post-hoc tests (LSD) found that students with Shenzhen household registration had a significantly higher entrepreneurship tendency than those from non-Shenzhen Guangdong ($P < 0.01$) and outside Guangdong ($P < 0.001$). Conversely, students from outside Guangdong placed significantly greater importance on “Salary and benefits” than those with Shenzhen household registration ($P < 0.05$), reflecting the initial economic pressure faced by these “new immigrants” to establish themselves in Shenzhen.

Concerning differences based on family background, independent samples t-tests found that students whose parents had entrepreneurial experience scored significantly higher on both “Entrepreneurship tendency” ($t = 5.42, P < 0.001$) and “Requirement for job autonomy” ($t = 3.78, P < 0.001$) compared to students whose parents lacked such experience. This strongly demonstrates the intergenerational transmission effect of family business culture and risk-taking spirit.

Regarding differences based on field of study, ANOVA indicated significant differences across majors in the “Importance attached to Corporate innovation atmosphere” ($F = 6.34, P < 0.01$) and “Acquiring cutting-edge industry knowledge” ($F = 7.88, P < 0.001$). Post-hoc tests showed that students majoring in electronic information scored significantly higher on both indicators than students in modern service industries and intelligent manufacturing majors ($P < 0.05$). This is closely related to the characteristics of Shenzhen’s globally leading electronic information industry, known for its rapid technological iteration, indicating that the specific traits

of the industry associated with a student's major precisely shape their values.

5. Conclusion

Through empirical analysis, this study systematically reveals the typical characteristics of the career values of Shenzhen's "post-00s" higher vocational students: they exhibit a dual structure of "enterprising pragmatism," emphasizing both skill enhancement and innovative development, while also focusing on remuneration and regional opportunities. This is concretely manifested in three major characteristics:

- (1) Internalized Innovation: Translating the city spirit of Shenzhen into an inherent demand for innovative environments and fair mechanisms;
- (2) Skill-based Orientation: Viewing personal skills as the fundamental guarantee for coping with market changes;
- (3) Rational Settlement: Basing career choices on a clear understanding of industries and self-positioning. This value map is the result of the mutual construction of the regional environment, industrial characteristics, and individual strategy, holding significant implications for the cultivation of innovative talent.

Based on the research findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed.

- (1) For higher vocational institutions:
 - (i) Establish a linkage mechanism integrating "major-industry-occupation," incorporating standards from strategic emerging industries like new-generation information technology and intelligent manufacturing into the

curriculum system, and setting up cutting-edge technology workshops;

- (ii) Implement classified guidance strategies: offer entrepreneurship practice courses for students with Shenzhen household registration, and strengthen vocational skill certification training for students from other regions;
 - (iii) Innovate quality education models: integrate the cultivation of innovative thinking into practical training, and establish a system for accumulating and converting "innovation credits";
- (2) For government departments:
 - (i) Improve the graded support system for technical and skilled talents, providing three-year housing subsidies and social security subsidies for non-Shenzhen hukou graduates;
 - (ii) Establish an effectiveness evaluation mechanism for industry-education integration, offering tax incentives and project priority support to enterprises that participate deeply in school-enterprise cooperation;
 - (3) For enterprises:
 - (i) Promote innovation in management models by establishing flat organizational structures and project-based teams, and implementing transparent reward mechanisms based on contribution.

Deepen industry-education collaboration to jointly cultivate a talent development ecosystem through initiatives like a "dual-tutor" system involving technical experts and the sharing of R&D projects.

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