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Constructing Integrated Career Habitus from High School to University: A 'Field-Habitus' Perspective

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Abstract

Based on Bourdieu's 'field-habitus' theory, this paper explores the continuity of students' career planning behaviours in high school and university, and the roles of social capital, cultural capital and economic capital behind them. Through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, this paper analyses Chinese high school and university level students' career planning patterns in different fields, and reveals the continuity of career planning habitus in high school and college and the challenges they face. It is found that adolescents' career planning in the three arenas of high school, transition (after the college entrance examination and before entering college), and college are influenced by their unique evaluation systems and dominant capitals, and different career planning habitus is formed. Students' career planning habits formed in high school often persist into university, especially among those with strong cultural and social capital. Meanwhile, differences in economic capital also had a significant impact on the continuity of students' career planning habitus. Based on the results of the study, the article also proposes career planning guidance strategies for different educational stages. The cultivation of career planning behaviours not only needs to be carried out in a single educational stage, but also needs to be continued and strengthened during the educational transition.

Keywords: *career integration, career planning, habitus, high school-college, pathway*

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial phase for exploring and nurturing academic and career-related interests. The high school period, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping prospective career objectives, fostering career interests, and enhancing self-efficacy (McWhirter et al., 2000). Prior studies emphasize that the trajectory of career choices begins as early as middle school, with the selection of a high school major significantly influencing subsequent career decisions (Shoffner et al., 2015). Therefore, it is essential to provide middle school students with comprehensive career-related knowledge, encourage career planning, and offer avenues for extensive career exploration (Arrington, 2000).

The career development of Chinese students differs significantly from that of their Western

counterparts due to unique challenges posed by China's college entrance examination, known as the Gaokao (Gao& Wang, 2021). As the sole criterion for college admissions, the Gaokao is a high-stakes, once-a-year examination available exclusively to 12th-grade students (Zhang, 2004). The intense competition and pivotal role of the Gaokao impose immense pressure on Chinese high school students (Bian, 2021). To alleviate this psychological burden and enhance student selection based on multiple factors, China has undertaken several reforms to improve the Gaokao system (Bian, 2021). Notably, since 2018, the new Gaokao model adopted in Shenzhen (the city where the current study was conducted) emphasizes academic ability, personality development, and overall well-being (Yang, 2021). This reform has eliminated the previous dichotomy between liberal arts and science subjects, allowing students to choose courses based on their interests, intended university majors, and future career aspirations (Zheng, 2022). The current "3+ 1+ 2" model enables students to take three subjects in the Gaokao, requiring them to select one subject from Physics or History, and two additional subjects from Chemistry, Biology, Geography, or Politics (Zheng, 2022). Consequently, the Gaokao reform promotes enhanced self-directed decision-making. However, as Chinese high school students often lack sufficient career exploration and understanding of their interests, university majors, and future occupational goals, they may face potential challenges (Yang, 2021). Moreover, the exam-centric education system tends to overshadow comprehensive career education (Yang, 2021).

Given the escalating competition in the job market and the profound societal shifts occurring during the transition from school to work, career exploration and education have become increasingly significant for Chinese youth (Jin, 2020). Consequently, prioritizing career development for high school students has emerged as a central concern within Chinese education reform (Yao& Jiang, 2021). Empowering students with career exploration opportunities can facilitate their understanding of future careers, clarify career interests and goals, rationalize subject choices for the college entrance examination and university majors, and enhance their future employability (Jin, 2020; Liu& Guo, 2013). Additionally, comprehensive career education instills practical significance in learning, fosters intrinsic motivation, and enhances self-efficacy, equipping students to cope with the high-pressure Gaokao environment (Liu& Guo, 2013).

Scholars have proposed various opinions regarding the articulation modes and methods for realizing career planning from high school to university. Some studies indicate that, in the context of the new college entrance examination reform, strengthening the articulation between university preparatory courses and high school curricula, along with implementing 'high school and university synergy' activities, can promote the continuity and effectiveness of career planning education (Ye, 2016). Furthermore, the path of career counseling varies at different stages, with the focus during high school on protecting students' career germination and assisting them in making career decisions, while the university stage emphasizes fostering career perspectives, enhancing professional identity, and establishing a clear connection between university studies and career choices (Wei, 2014). Another study advocates a 'forward and backward' strategy for career guidance and services, promoting the construction of an integrated career planning framework through front-loading career education, refining the educational system, and implementing industry-run schools, thereby helping students develop a lifelong development concept (Mei, 2023). Additionally, to ensure the completeness and coherence of career education, scholars emphasize the need for synergy across various aspects, from policy-level initiatives to curriculum design, teacher development, and mutual support mechanisms, to facilitate the long-term advancement of career education (Chang, 2019).

In summary, while different scholars have examined the integration of high school and college career planning from various perspectives, research on this issue through the lens of the sociological theory of 'field-habits' remains relatively scarce. This study seeks to clarify the influence of different forms of capital on career habits in the process of high school-college career planning, providing new perspectives and insights for constructing pathways that integrate high school and college career planning habits.

Based on this, students in different fields face varying evaluation indices, operate under different dominant capitals, and possess distinct habits for career planning. Accordingly, this study

proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive correlation between cultural capital and students' career planning habits in the high school field, where cultural capital is proxied by the type of high school attended.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive correlation between social capital and students' career planning habits in the high school field, where social capital is proxied by students' place of origin.

Hypothesis 3: During the stage between high school graduation and pre-college entry, cultural and social capital collaboratively influence students' career development, as reflected in the impact of continuous career planning education.

Hypothesis 4: In the university arena, students' engagement in their studies is positively correlated with their career planning.

2. Theoretical Framework: 'Field-Habits' Theory

2.1 Field, capital and habits

A field can be defined as a network or configuration of objective relationships among various positions. The existence of these positions, along with the determinants they impose on the actors or institutions that occupy them, defines the field objectively. This definition is grounded in the different types of power or capital possessed by these actors, which implies the right to benefit from the specific advantages at stake within the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2016). These advantages encompass both actual and potential situations within the distributive structure of these positions, as well as their objective relationships with other positions, including relations of domination, subordination, and structural correspondences (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2016).

The concept of habits, central to Bourdieu's theoretical framework, is complex. The relationship between habits and field is reciprocal and nuanced. On one hand, this relationship is conditioning: the field shapes the habits, rendering it a product of the inherent properties of the field or a series of intertwined fields that may be separated or divergent enough to lead to the habits' intrinsic differentiation or even disintegration. On the other hand, this relationship involves knowledge or cognitive construction. Habits aids in constructing the field as a meaningful world, infused with feelings and values, worthy of commitment and endeavor (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2016).

In examining the relationship between field and habits, it is crucial to consider another important concept within the field: capital. According to Bourdieu, capital is classified into economic, cultural, social, and symbolic forms (Grenfell, 2009). Capital can be concretized, materialized, and institutionalized (Edgerton& Roberts, 2014). The value of capital is contingent upon the existence of a specific game or field that facilitates its effectiveness: capital is always relevant and potent within a given field, serving as both a tool for struggle and a key to contestation. This enables its owner to exert power over others and influence the examined field, thereby establishing their presence as a significant force rather than an inconsequential one (Bourdieu& Wacquant, 2016).

Capital is the product of accumulated labor, existing in either a materialized or embodied form, and serves as a tangible force within the field, reliant on the field for its existence. Changes in the field depend on the amount and structure of capital that actors aim to contest and accumulate. Consequently, the field becomes a site of contestation, and this contestation drives changes within the field. Bourdieu posits that the conflict and competition among actors in the field depend on their status, capacity, and the strategies they adopt in their struggles, which are closely linked to the various forms of capital they possess (Xiao, 2021).

2.2 Career Planning in High School and University from the Perspective of 'Field-Habits'

Currently, there are three relatively independent fields concerning students' educational trajectories: high school, the transitional period after high school graduation and before university entry, and the

university itself. In these three fields, students encounter distinct evaluation standards, various authorities, and differing physical and mental characteristics that influence their career development. This study emphasizes the varying dominant capital situations faced by these three arenas, which significantly impact students' career-related habits.

In the high school field, the primary evaluation metric is academic performance, with family, social, and cultural capital collectively contributing to students' success. These capitals work towards a shared goal: gaining admission to desired colleges and universities. Students can enhance their capital through matriculation programs (Webber, 2024). During the transitional phase after high school and before university admission, the dominance of the school field diminishes, shifting towards the family and social fields. Here, family capital underpins students' decisions about their future, with some parents continuing to invest in their children's education. For middle and upper-class families, this investment often takes the form of purchasing certainty for their children's futures through various volunteer organizations (Wang, 2024).

Upon entering university, students re-engage with the university field, where evaluations are pluralistic, and employment outcomes represent just one of several important indicators of success. At this stage, both school cultural capital and family capital play significant roles. However, as individual students mature, their personal agency in career development begins to dominate. Students cultivate their values and career orientations through embodied cultural capital, as well as materialized cultural capital, accessed via channels like the internet and social media (Czerniewicz& Brown, 2013). Career development theory posits that individuals engage in continuous career development throughout their lives (Jin, 2007). Regardless of their educational stage, individuals should progressively develop the ability to plan their life paths and choose suitable careers, fostering an objective understanding of their interests, strengths, weaknesses, personality traits, and values, while integrating social developments and occupational needs into their career trajectories (Wei, 2014). Thus, establishing a habits that integrates career planning from high school to college is particularly crucial.

'Habits' is contingent upon the field, with a two-way constructive relationship realized through actors' ongoing competition and accumulation of field capital (Li, 2018). During the high school and university stages, students operate in different fields, facing varying evaluation systems. Consequently, the dominant capital in each context results in differing career planning habits. The disparity between these habits and the objective need for career planning knowledge in light of new college entrance examination requirements creates a contradiction, leading to issues such as students' disinterest in their chosen university majors. This disengagement can manifest as insufficient motivation for learning and a diminished sense of personal value, which adversely affects students' employment prospects and overall personal development, thereby impacting national talent cultivation.

From the 'field-habits' perspective, this study positions students' career planning habits within different fields and aims to elucidate the influences of family capital, school cultural capital, and social capital on this habits across various stages: high school, the transitional period, and university. By clarifying the impact of these capital forms on students' career planning habits and the transition process from high school to university, the study aims to provide insights for constructing an integrated career habits throughout the educational continuum.

3. Methodology

To gain a deeper understanding of students' career planning from high school to university, this study focuses on students currently enrolled in high schools or universities in Beijing as the sample population. To ensure the quality of the questionnaire, this research has finalized the survey on "high school-university" students' career integration practices based on rigorous testing, feedback, and modifications made in collaboration with the Beijing Second Institute of Foreign Languages. The questionnaire is organized into four sections: students' basic information, career development during

high school, career development after high school graduation and before entering university, and career development after entering university. This structure aims to identify the current situations and challenges in the convergence of different educational stages, ultimately providing insights and methodologies for addressing these issues.

To further enhance the representativeness of the sample, students were surveyed from more than 50 colleges and universities, encompassing institutions affiliated with the Beijing Municipal Government as well as those directly under the Ministry of Education. The sample includes comprehensive colleges and universities, specialized faculties and departments, general undergraduate programs, and 'double first-class' institutions. The disciplines represented in the questionnaire range widely, covering literature, management, economics, law, science, engineering, and agriculture, among others. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, of which 384 were successfully completed and returned, resulting in an impressive effective recovery rate of 96%. The sample features a roughly equal distribution of male and female respondents, includes various grade levels, and spans multiple types of disciplines. Furthermore, it captures diverse geographical areas and incorporates different types of high schools and universities, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the student population.

4. Findings and Analyses

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The data presented in Table 1 illustrate the primary characteristics of high school students regarding their family background, career planning, and career development. Significant disparities are evident in students' school and family backgrounds based on the type of high school attended and their place of origin, with mean values of 2.41 and 2.59, respectively. This indicates that most students hail from key high schools located in district and county areas, as well as county or prefecture-level cities. In terms of parental qualifications, the mean values for both fathers' and mothers' educational attainment are close to the specialist level, highlighting variability in family educational backgrounds. Regarding career planning, students exhibit a high level of knowledge and ability in this area, with their willingness and perceived necessity for career planning widely recognized. Mean values of 3.53, 3.54, 3.82, and 4.22 reflect students' general awareness of the significance of career planning. However, participation in career-related activities remains relatively limited, with a mean value of 3.07, suggesting involvement typically ranges between one to five times. Students' career plans appear to evolve between high school and college, evidenced by a mean value of 3.52.

For satisfaction with their college majors, the mean value is 3.78, indicating a strong recognition of the fields they were admitted to. Students primarily base their choice of major on personal interest, reflected by a mean value of 1.77. Conversely, many students report challenges in securing scholarships due to their circumstances, resulting in a mean value of 2.50.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Questionnaire

Variable	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Standard Deviation
High School Type	1	4	2.41	1.109
Type of birthplace	1	5	2.59	1.324
Father's education	1	5	3.70	1.052
Mother's Education	1	8	3.80	2.312
Father's career development	1	5	2.24	1.030
Knowledge of mastering one's own career planning in high school	1	5	3.53	0.855
Ability to master career planning in high school	1	5	3.54	0.905

Variable	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Willingness to improve one's own career planning at high school level	1	5	3.82	0.852
Necessity of acquiring knowledge and competence in career planning at the high school level	1	5	4.22	0.698
Participation in career-related courses or activities	2	5	3.07	0.762
Future career planning	1	5	3.52	1.288
Satisfaction with and recognition of university admitted majors	1	5	3.78	0.805
Principle of major selection	1	3	1.77	0.713
Types of scholarships	1	3	2.50	0.723

4.2 Hypothesis testing

Based on the hypotheses outlined in this paper, the results of our analysis are as follows:

Both cultural and social capital are positively correlated with students' career planning habits across the high school field and the transition from high school to college, thereby confirming Hypothesis 1.

First, the type of high school significantly impacts students' career education. There are marked differences in career planning knowledge ($F=8.500$, $p<0.001$) and ability ($F=6.551$, $p<0.001$) among students from different high school types. Similarly, disparities exist in students' motivation to enhance their career planning ($F=5.519$, $p<0.01$) and their perceived need to acquire relevant knowledge and competencies ($F=4.623$, $p<0.05$). These findings underscore the substantial influence of high school type on students' career education, particularly in terms of knowledge and skills acquisition.

Post-hoc comparisons (LSD) in Table 2 further elucidate these differences. For instance, students in provincial key high schools scored significantly higher in recognizing the necessity of acquiring career planning knowledge compared to those in general high schools (mean difference = 0.286, $p<0.01$), district and county key high schools (mean difference = 0.369, $p<0.001$), and prefecture and city key high schools (mean difference = 0.263, $p<0.05$). Additionally, students from general high schools scored significantly lower in both knowledge and competence in career planning compared to their peers from district, prefecture, and provincial key high schools (all $p<0.001$). For example, the mean difference between general and provincial key high schools was -0.520 ($p<0.001$) for career planning knowledge and -0.468 ($p<0.001$) for career planning competence. Furthermore, students in general high schools demonstrated significantly less willingness to improve their career planning skills compared to those in provincial key high schools (mean difference = -0.449, $p<0.001$).

These results suggest that students in provincial key high schools possess superior career planning knowledge and skills, as well as a greater motivation to improve these abilities, indicating that educational resources and support vary significantly across high school types and profoundly affect students' career education.

Table 2. Post-hoc Comparison of High School Types (LSD)

Dependent Variable	(I) Type of Birthplace	(J) Type of Birthplace	(I-J)Difference in means	Standard error
The necessary of acquiring career planning knowledge and skills at the senior secondary level	Provincial Key High School	General High School	0.286**	0.101
		District Key High School	0.369***	0.104
		Municipal key high schools	0.263*	0.103
The extent of students' acquisition of career	General High	District Key	-0.413***	0.117

Dependent Variable	(I) Type of Birthplace	(J) Type of Birthplace	(I-J)Difference in means	Standard error
planning knowledge at the senior secondary school level	School	High School		
		Municipal key high schools	-0.483***	0.116
		Provincial Key High School	-0.520***	0.122
The ability to master career planning at the senior high school level	General High School	District Key High School	-0.448***	0.125
		Municipal key high schools	-0.425***	0.123
		Provincial Key High School	-0.468***	0.130
Willingness to improve the level of career planning at the senior secondary level	General High School	District Key High School	-0.364**	0.118
		Municipal key high schools	-0.329**	0.116
		Provincial Key High School	-0.449***	0.123

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

Secondly, the place of origin significantly influences career education at the high school level, confirming Hypothesis 2. The data show that place of origin affects students' mastery of career planning knowledge (F=5.494, p<0.001) and competence (F=3.822, p<0.01). Post hoc comparisons in Table 4 reveal that students from counties scored significantly lower in career planning knowledge compared to those from capital cities (mean difference= -0.536, p<0.001) and municipalities (mean difference= -0.619, p<0.05). Additionally, students from municipalities outperformed their rural counterparts in both knowledge (mean difference = 0.351, p<0.001) and competence (mean difference= 0.449, p<0.01), as well as students from counties and prefectures (all p<0.05). These findings highlight significant regional disparities in career planning education, with students in larger cities benefiting from better resources and opportunities.

Table 3. Post-hoc comparison of knowledge on career education at upper secondary level by type of place of origin (LSD)

Dependent variable	(I) Type of birthplace	(J) Type of birthplace	(I-J)Difference in means	Standard error
Mastering own career planning in high school	County Cities	Rural	-0.268*	0.121
		Prefectural Cities	-0.269*	0.124
		Provincial Capital Cities	-0.536***	0.145
		Directly governed central cities	-0.619*	0.156
	Directly governed central cities	Rural	0.351***	0.151
		County Cities	0.619*	0.156
		Prefectural Cities	0.350*	0.154
Mastering the ability to plan one's own career in high school	Directly governed central cities	Rural	0.449**	0.161
		County Cities	0.597***	0.166
		Prefectural Cities	0.420*	0.164

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

Third, during the transition between high school and college- primarily an out-of-school environment- cultural and social capital jointly influence career development, supporting Hypothesis

3. Continuous career planning education positively affects students' career trajectories. Specifically, the mean participation in career-related activities for students in general high schools was 2.83 (SD = 0.746), significantly lower than that of students in district-, prefecture-, and provincial-focused high schools. This suggests that general high schools offer fewer career-related opportunities, with significant differences in participation frequency (F = 6.026, p<0.001) compared to other high school types. These findings underscore the role of school cultural capital in shaping career planning habits.
Fourth, parental influence, particularly family affluence, plays a key role in career planning, supporting Hypothesis 4. Parental educational attainment, as a form of cultural capital, significantly affects students' participation in career-related activities after high school. Students whose fathers hold a master's degree participated more in such activities compared to those with bachelor's degrees, while those with less than specialist-level education participated significantly less (Huang, X., 2019). Although the sample size limits the significance of PhD qualifications, similar trends are observed with mothers' education levels. Students with mothers holding doctoral degrees exhibited higher participation rates, while those with master's degrees also participated more than those with undergraduate or lower qualifications.

Table 4. Impact of parental qualifications on participation in career-related courses or activities

Independent Variable		Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	Significance Test
Father's Education Level	Master's Degree	42	3.33	0.650	5.672***	>Bachelor's Degree*、>Associate degree or below***
	Associate degree or below	124	2.85	0.695		<Bachelor's Degree*、<Associate degree***
Mother's education level	Doctoral Degree	7	3.86	0.690	4.478**	>Bachelor's Degree**、>Associate degree*、>Associate degree or below**
	Master's Degree	23	3.43	0.662		>Bachelor's Degree*、>Associate degree or below**

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

The father's career trajectory significantly influences students' specialty choices. Personal interest is the primary criterion for students, especially when their father is perceived as an ordinary employee, with financial incentives and available resources also playing a role. However, when students view their father's career as higher in social status, they are more inclined to pursue fields critical to state and societal development.

Similarly, the mother's career type significantly impacts students' career planning. Table 5 shows that students whose mothers work in state organs, party organizations, enterprises, or hold professional and technical roles have significantly better career planning outcomes than those whose mothers are in business, service sectors, or agricultural and production roles (F=4.087, p<0.001). These results emphasize the importance of a mother's occupational background in shaping students' future career trajectories.

Table 5. Post-hoc comparison of the effect of mother's occupation type on students' future career planning situation (LSD)

Dependent Variable	(I) Mother's Occupation	(J) Mother's Occupation Type	(I-J) Difference in Means	Standard Error
Status of future career plans	Heads of state organs, party organizations, enterprises and institutions	Commercial and service workers	0.562**	0.210
		Agricultural, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery, water conservancy production workers	0.933***	0.287
		Other workers	0.692**	0.220
	Professionals and technicians	Commercial and service workers	0.578*	0.209
		Agricultural, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery, water conservancy production workers	0.949***	0.286
		Production and transport equipment operators and related personnel	0.649*	0.327
		Other workers	0.709***	0.219

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

Fifth, personal factors in the university setting are positively correlated with students' career habits, validating Hypothesis 4. Table 6 shows that students who selected majors based on personal interest had a more balanced range of future plans, though many reported unspecified plans during high school. In contrast, students choosing majors with strong employment prospects demonstrated clearer plans, focusing on career stability. Those selecting majors critical for state and societal development showed less clarity in planning, often transitioning from no plans to gradually forming specific goals.

These findings suggest that the criteria for major selection significantly influence the clarity and stability of students' future plans. Furthermore, awareness of the importance of selecting colleges and majors during high school significantly affects students' satisfaction with their university majors (F=7.247, p<0.0016). This underscores the critical role of early understanding in shaping students' satisfaction with their college admissions.

Table 6. Principles of professionalism - planning for the future: cross tabulation table

Items		Planning for the future					Total
		Stable Career Plan since High School	Evolving Career Plan through High School and College	Lost Career Focus from High School to College	Developing Career Plan from High School to College	No Career Plan	
Catering for personal interests	Counting	$5_{a, b}$	$33_{a, b}$	$26_{a, b}$	33_{b}	56_{b}	153
	Expectation Count	7.6	37.9	21.9	38.6	47.0	153.0
	percent	26.3%	34.7%	47.3%	34.0%	47.5%	39.8%
Well-employed professions	Counting	12_{a}	52_{a}	24_{a}	52_{a}	28_{b}	168
	Expectation Count	8.3	41.6	24.1	42.4	51.6	168.0
	percent	63.2%	54.7%	43.6%	53.6%	23.7%	43.8%
Professional and technician	Counting	$2_{a, b}$	10_{b}	5_{b}	12_{b}	34_{a}	63
	Expectation Count	3.1	15.6	9.0	15.9	19.4	63.0
	percent	10.5%	10.5%	9.1%	12.4%	28.8%	16.4%

Note: If two samples have one letter the same, the difference between these two samples is not significant, e.g., a and ab, b and bc, and if different letters are marked that is a significant difference.

5. Discussion

The findings and analyses in this paper suggest that the development of students' career habits across different educational stages is shaped by cultural and social capital, as well as by their personal autonomy. Therefore, constructing an integrated, cross-field system that supports the formation of students' career habits throughout both high school and university is crucial.

5.1 High School Field: Leveraging the Influence of School Cultural Capital

When family capital is difficult to alter, strengthening the influence of cultural capital on career planning becomes essential. As Bourdieu (2007) argues, parents' social class provides not only cultural capital but also other forms of capital that enhance engagement in their children's education. This need is particularly urgent in regions and high schools, especially county-level and non-specialized institutions, where resource imbalances are more pronounced. Amplifying the positive effects of cultural and social capital can help mitigate these disparities in career planning habitus.

Furthermore, diverse career education approaches should be implemented at the senior high school level. Research shows that students prefer methods such as inviting alumni and university faculty to share experiences, organizing field trips, hosting industry expert lectures, and incorporating career discussions into subject teaching. These strategies broaden students' perspectives on career planning, making education more relevant and practical.

During the transition from high school to university, integrating resources among high schools, universities, families, and society is vital for synergy. This can be achieved through two key strategies. First, utilizing big data tools enhances information accessibility. The research revealed that a significant proportion of students lacked clarity about their chosen majors, employment prospects, and university choices, relying predominantly on online searches (83.85%), followed by consultations with relatives and friends (59.64%), specialized agencies (51.82%), and direct contact with colleges (49.22%). Establishing a comprehensive, authoritative online platform is therefore crucial for effective career planning. For example, the "Init2Winit" app, tested in Midwest high schools, significantly raised college aspirations (Chen et al., 2021).

Second, addressing the differing needs of students from various high school types is critical. Research indicates that science and gifted high school students often pursue postgraduate studies, while general high school students emphasize practical career planning (Oh & Choi, 2021). Tailoring career education to meet these varied needs ensures that all students have appropriate guidance.

Additionally, the coordination between educational authorities is essential to ensure the continuity of career education, especially during the transition period between high school graduation and university entry. This 'vacuum' period, which involves volunteering and major selection, requires greater integration and collaboration. Parental education levels also significantly influence students' participation in career education. Studies demonstrate that parental support, self-esteem, and career self-understanding are critical to career planning (Cho & Son, 2020). Parental involvement has been shown to correlate strongly with career satisfaction (Zhao & Qin, 2022). Therefore, parents should be considered key partners in career education, increasing their awareness and engagement in the process (Liu, 2018). Collaborative efforts between schools and families can further enhance students' career planning and labor market outcomes (Ahearn, 2021).

5.2 University Stage: The Comprehensive Career Education Mechanism

Research shows that the most effective forms of career education include relevant courses (57.29%), professional teachers (52.08%), and online resources (46.35%). When facing career challenges, students rely on online resources (66.93%), professional teachers (52.86%), and courses (46.88%), with less trust placed in parents (43.23%), counselors (38.02%), and agencies (33.85%). This highlights the need to strengthen career education mechanisms. First, expanding the guidance capacity of

professional teachers and broadening career education courses are essential. Second, improving counselors' outreach and building trust with students can enhance holistic development.

Students' perceptions of college and major selection significantly impact their satisfaction, with 48.18% feeling uncertain about their direction and over 50% expressing confusion about their studies. The main reasons include uncertainty about career paths (60.94%), time conflicts (48.96%), disconnect between expectations and university experience (42.71%), unclear learning goals (39.32%), and mismatch between majors and personal interests (35.42%).

Career education should start in high school, focusing on professional development. Scholars recommend improving continuity between high school and pre-university curricula (Ye, 2016) and supporting transitional programs like the "Youth Sailing Dreaming Jin" camp. However, fee-based programs limit access for disadvantaged students, exacerbating educational inequities (Zhu, 2022). While achieving full equity is difficult, integrated career education can reduce disparities.

At the university level, career planning courses significantly improve students' career outcomes. Participation increases alternative career planning and employability (Winters et al., 2018), while vocational students report enhanced career awareness (Zhao & Wu, 2022). Early exposure to these courses fosters self-regulation and decision-making (Lee & Yu, 2024). Teachers' guidance competencies are critical, as varying support mechanisms influence their effectiveness (Wook et al., 2020; Catanzano et al., 2021). A cohesive career education system from high school to university, emphasizing targeted courses and teacher support, can foster students' smooth transitions and overall development.

5.3 *Enhancing student autonomy*

The concept of career has evolved to encompass all aspects of life, including role-playing (Samuel & Louise, 2010). Among the five stages of human career development, the transition from high school to college represents an exploratory period (ages 15-24), during which students investigate themselves and their external environment through academics, leisure activities, and preliminary work experiences. This exploration facilitates the gradual development of a realistic self-concept and the tentative identification of career choices (Zhou & Xie, 2022). This process can be segmented into three distinct phases: a trial period (ages 15-17), an experimentation/transition period (ages 18-21), and a stabilization period (ages 22-24), with each stage contributing to the gradual clarification of career choices.

At the senior secondary level, student engagement is crucial for successful learning, yet effectively motivating students can often be a challenge. Career planning and educational programs can bridge the connection between students' high school studies and their future careers (Plasman, 2018). Students should actively develop their plans for further learning through personal experiences rather than relying on externally imposed or accidental influences (Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2015; Greenwood, 2008). The successful formulation of a career plan reflects students' career maturity (Alvarez-Gonzalez, 2008; Borges, Richard, & Duffy, 2007), making career planning an essential component of school-based career counseling services (Dahlan, 2021). Research indicates that social support has a more substantial impact on career resilience than career barriers, which directly influence students' career planning and development (Youngsup, 2024). Additionally, positive career planning attitudes—such as career optimism and adaptability—serve as critical motivational factors in the pursuit of career goals (Chatterjee & Chhetri, 2023).

High levels of career planning are typically associated with clear goals, thoughtful self-assessment, specific action steps, and a comprehensive understanding of potential challenges (Hunt et al., 2017). All of these factors contribute to enhancing students' agency in their careers. Thus, providing targeted guidance based on the developmental characteristics of different stages has a lasting impact on students' career planning (Zhu, 2021). Career planning necessitates not only the establishment of concepts but, more importantly, the internalization of emotional identity and its practical implementation. In today's fast-changing society, the dynamics of social and labor markets,

alongside the rapid development of new technologies, demand that students adopt a more proactive and flexible approach (Sharlanova, 2020).

The college years are particularly critical for career development (Gore & Metz, 2008). During this period, students refine their interests through coursework and career exploration, receiving support or facing hindrances from goal-setting, peers, and mentors (Hiester, Nordstrom, & Swenson, 2009; Lapan, 2004). However, many college students experience stress and hopelessness while pursuing their career objectives (Constantine, Wilton, & Caldwell, 2003; Rice, Leever, Christopher, & Porter, 2006), which can impair their ability to adapt to a rapidly changing workplace environment (Savickas, 1995). Therefore, in addition to assisting students in skill development, it is essential to address their sense of hope regarding their career pursuits.

Research suggests that hope fosters resilience, persistence, and well-being (Gallagher & Lopez, 2009; Hurley, 2004; Marques, Pais-Ribeiro, & Lopez, 2008) and provides emotional reinforcement in goal pursuit. Individuals who cultivate hope tend to experience higher levels of confidence and happiness, whereas those who limit their perspectives are more likely to encounter negative emotions (Snyder, 1994). Hope is an emotion that can be cultivated; although it often originates from early experiences, it can also be enhanced through ongoing learning and achievements later in life (Sung & Kaewchinda, 2012).

6. Conclusion

By examining the continuum of students' career planning from high school to university through the lens of Bourdieu's field-habitus theory, this study explores the influence of family, social, and school cultural capital on career planning habits. The findings reveal distinct patterns across educational stages: family cultural capital plays a dominant role in high school but diminishes during the transition to college, where social capital and school cultural capital become more influential at the university level.

The study tested four key hypotheses: (1) family cultural capital significantly influences career planning in high school, particularly through parental education and support, but its impact wanes during the transition phase; (2) social capital enhances career planning during the transition, as social networks assist students in adapting to new environments; (3) school cultural capital becomes critical at the university level, where institutional resources and career support play a central role; and (4) the interaction of different forms of capital is essential for the continuity of career planning, shaping students' career trajectories.

The study highlights that varying evaluation systems at different educational stages shape students' career planning habits. In high school, career planning is closely tied to achieving success in the college entrance exam, with cultural and social capital exerting differing influences based on school type. A noticeable gap exists between students from key high schools and those from ordinary high schools in terms of career planning capabilities. During the transition from high school to university, the combined effects of cultural and social capital remain evident, with students from more privileged backgrounds engaging more actively in career education. At the university level, career planning becomes increasingly self-driven, with students' prior understanding of their college and major choices playing a crucial role in their academic satisfaction, scholarship attainment, and future career prospects.

A key finding of this study is the discontinuity in career planning during the transition from high school to university, which is exacerbated by unequal access to educational resources. This disparity weakens students' career motivation and professional adaptability, ultimately affecting long-term career development. To mitigate these challenges, this study proposes constructing an integrated career planning framework that fosters continuity from high school to university, promotes systematic career development, and enhances educational equity and employment outcomes.

The results of this study carry significant implications for educational practice and policy-

making. First, given that the persistence of career planning is influenced by multiple forms of capital, schools and universities should actively collaborate to develop integrated career education programs. For example, joint initiatives—such as combined career development workshops, mentorship programs, and internship opportunities—could facilitate a smoother transition for students from high school to higher education and ensure continuity in career guidance. Second, education policies must more directly address the disparities in career planning opportunities across different socio-economic backgrounds. This could involve allocating additional resources to under-resourced schools, providing targeted funding for career counseling services, and promoting professional development for career advisors. Such strategies would help bridge the gap between students from diverse socio-economic settings, ensuring that all have equitable access to effective career planning support. Third, specific interventions should be implemented to support students who lack cultural and social capital. Potential measures include establishing dedicated support centers, offering tailored career counseling, and utilizing technology to disseminate accessible career planning resources. These targeted efforts would empower students with limited social and cultural networks to engage in proactive and informed career planning. Collectively, these recommendations underscore the need for a comprehensive approach that involves collaborative efforts between educational institutions and policy-makers, ensuring that career planning support is both inclusive and effective across all levels of education.

At the theoretical level, this study offers new perspectives on the processes and influencing factors of career planning through the application of Bourdieu's field-habitus theory. First, it expands the analysis of the roles of cultural capital, social capital, and school capital across different educational stages, filling a research gap regarding the continuum of career planning. Second, it reveals the interactive effects of various forms of capital, enriching the application of Bourdieu's theory in educational research. Finally, the study provides a novel theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between career planning education and social inequality, contributing to a deeper understanding of the structural differences in the developmental processes of students from diverse social contexts. Moreover, by situating the findings within an international perspective, this study highlights the unique characteristics of China's exam-centered education system in shaping career planning. Compared to Western countries and other Asian systems where career counseling is often integrated into high school curricula, the Chinese model places a stronger emphasis on academic performance, potentially limiting early career exploration and guidance. This contrast underscores the need for policy discussions on integrating more structured career education within China's secondary education system.

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