

Influences of Occupational Status and Workplace Training on Vocational Students' Occupational Identity: a Chinese Context

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ABSTRACT

Occupation status, perception of workplace training and occupational identity are measured with 724 Chinese Vocational students by qualified instruments. Results of the structural equation model indicate that occupational status and workplace training all influence students' occupational identity, while the quality of workplace training has greater influence compared with occupational status, which challenges conventional Chinese views on occupational status and illustrates the importance of workplace training. Furthermore, as the result of regression model, "Expert Culture", "Match of tasks with competence", "Task Complexity" and "Autonomy", regarding the quality of workplace training, predicts the variation of vocational students' occupational identity.

Key words: Occupational Status; Workplace Training; Occupational Identity; Chinese Context

I. INTRODUCTION

Occupational identity is defined as the identification with an occupational field or affiliation to a social or professional group from the perspective of Social Identity Theory, which provides a thorough description of the context in which personal identities develop and shows how context and identities relate to one another (Reader, 2008). Actually, students' occupational identity formation begins during vocational education and training (Virtanen et al, 2008), and offers a sustainable source of intrinsic motivation that directs and secures individual engagement with the occupation (Rauner, 1999). Occupational status and workplace training are investigated to shed light on how these contextual factors influence vocational students' occupational identity within a Chinese context.

Occupational status is a generic term, covering prestige and socioeconomic status, and reflecting the occupational structure of the respective society (Ganzeboom & Treiman, 1996). In China, differentiations among various social hierarchies are significant. Occupational status which indicates social stratification plays an influential role in occupation selection and occupational identity development (Qiu, 2001). An occupation with high status tends to be positively identified and vice versa.

Workplace that provides individuals with practical chances and real work environment is regarded to be beneficial to vocational learning and occupational identity development (Kirpal, 2006; Klotz et al, 2014). Nevertheless, from the pedagogical point of view, workplace itself does not directly have the learning potential and factors in the workplace should be systematically designed so as to promote the development of occupational identity. These include the involvement into expert culture, measures facilitating the transparency of one's own work and the interrelations to the work of others, task variety, task complexity, match of tasks and vocational competence, autonomy to fulfill tasks (Zimmermann et al, 1999).

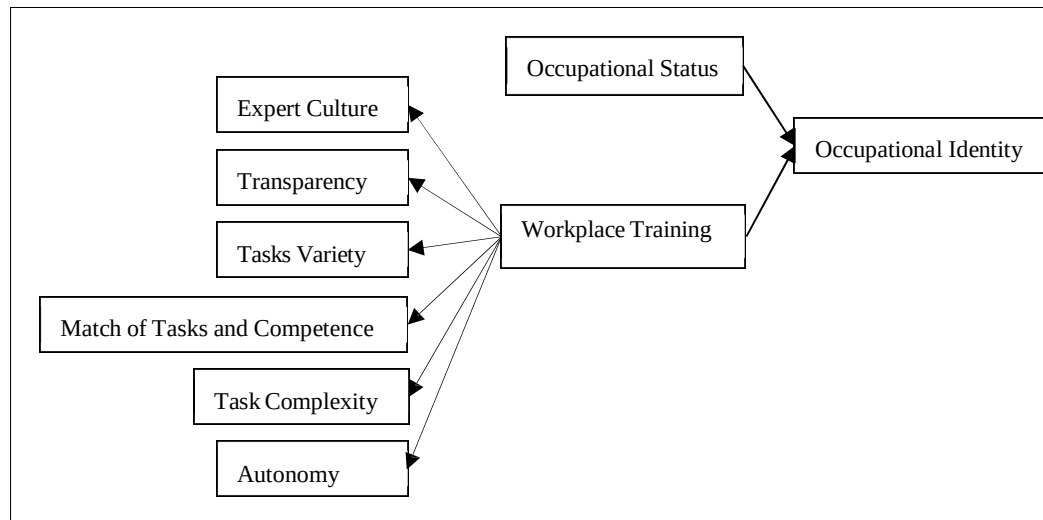


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

II. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

724 students majoring in vehicle maintenance are surveyed, of whom, 692 (95.%) are male and 31 (4.4%) are female, fundamentally in line with the sex distribution of this major. The valid rate is 100%. They have just finished the second year of vocational education. The first year is school-based and workplace training is arranged along with school-based learning in the second year.

2. Instruments and Measures

5-point Likert scales developed in the KOMET project on the base of "International Socio-Economic Index of Occupation Status", "Mannheimer Inventar zur Erfassung betrieblicher Ausbildungssituationen" are used to measure occupational status, students' perception of workplace training and occupational identity. The Cronbach α coefficients of the 8 subscales range from 0.62 (with 3 items) to 0.89, which are statistically acceptable.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Structural Relations of Occupational Status, Workplace Training and Occupational Identity

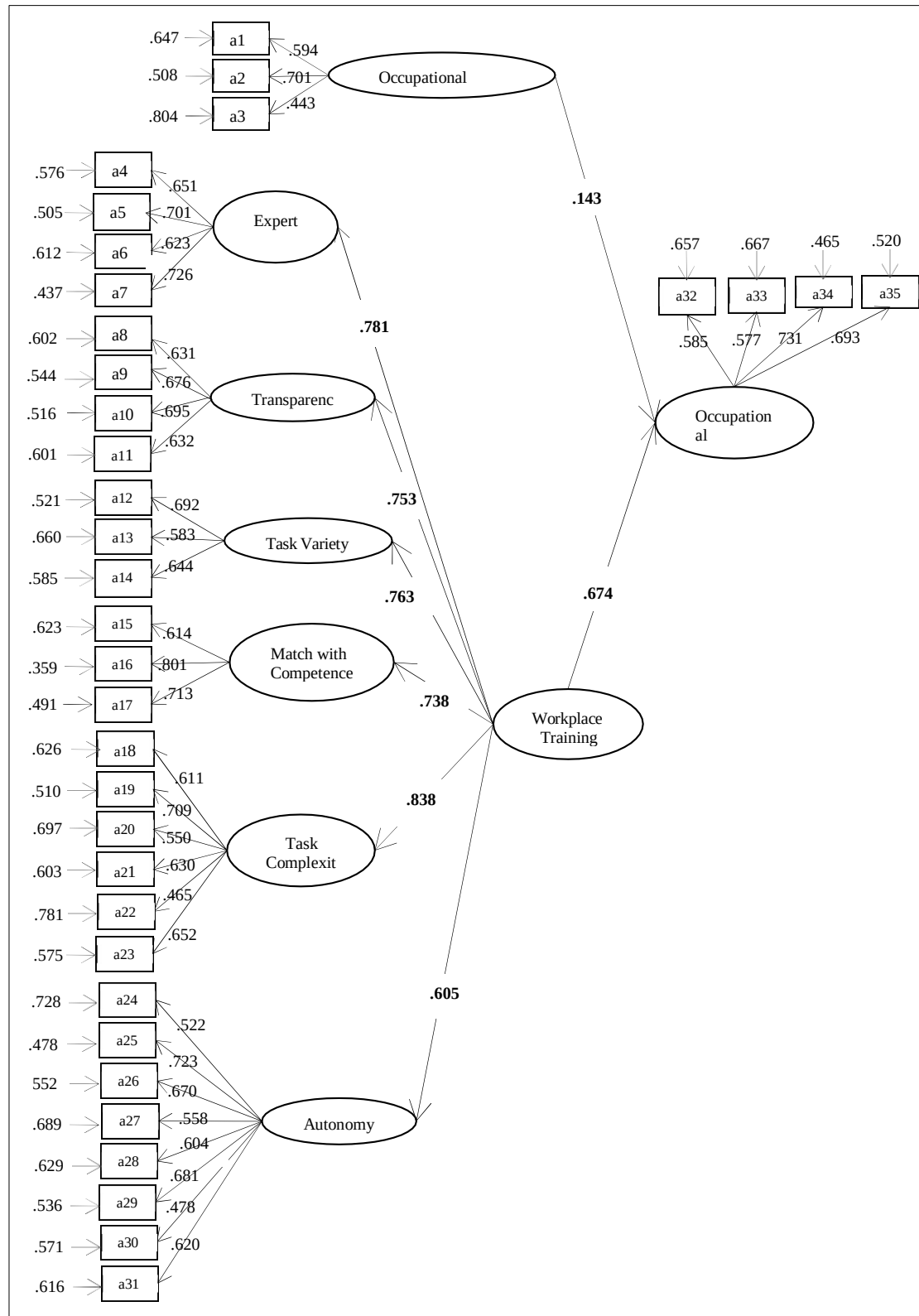


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model

Table 1. Indicators of Model Fit

	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	Sig	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Standards for Model Fit			<3	>.05	>.90	>.90	<.08	<.08
Results	1087.10	551	1.92	.00	.920	.913	.039	.044

The structural equation model set on the base of theoretical framework fits well with the data (as shown in Table 1), indicating the following results:

(1) Occupational status influence occupational identity significantly with a path coefficient of .143. Comparatively Higher occupational status will positively predict higher occupational identity. As in China, occupation with high status for individuals is not only sources of satisfaction psychologically, but also sources of self-affirmation with regard to social value (Zhang, 2005).

(2) Students' perception of the quality of workplace training with 6 factors as a whole influences occupational identity significantly with a high path coefficient of .674. The quality of activities and interaction in the workplace influence extensively individual's identification with the occupation and participation into the community of practice as well as the affiliation to an occupational group (Billet & Somerville, 2004; Baruch & Cohen, 2007).

(3) The quality of workplace training has a major influence on occupational identity, compared with occupational status, which confirms the importance of workplace training in regards to its effects on occupational identity development. More interesting, this finding challenges the conventional Chinese views of the decisive role that occupational status plays on individual's occupational identity. In the circumstance that graduates of vocational education mainly step into the secondary labor market and occupies with relatively low status, well-designed workplace training could overcome the limitations and positively influence vocational students' occupational identity to a large extent.

2. Further Regression Results about Factors of Workplace Training on Occupational Identity

Table 2. Regression Model of Workplace Training on Occupational Identity

	Beta	t	Sig	Partial
Expert Culture	.116	2.786	.005	.109
Transparency	.057	1.345	.179	.053
Task Variety	.006	.142	.887	.006
Match of Tasks with Competence	.161	3.933	.000	.153
Task Complexity	.253	6.035	.000	.232
Autonomy	.141	3.765	.000	.147
$R^2_{\text{adjust}} = .294$				

Regression model illustrates that, factors of workplace training are able to explain 29.4% of the variation of students' occupational identity, which reconfirms the influential role of workplace training on occupational identity.

(1) "Expert Culture", "Match of tasks with competence", "Task Complexity" and "Autonomy", as indicators of the quality of workplace training, have significant influences on vocational students' occupational identity.

This confirms the value of supportive experts and their guidance on vocational students' participation into specific community of practice and their identification of certain occupation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Heinz, 2008; Newton et al, 2009; Rausch & Schley, 2011).

In accordance with empirical evidences of Zoelch (2008), Heinemann and Rauner (2008), the

autonomy to fulfill work tasks as well as match of task demands and students' vocational competence allowing for the utilization of competence promote positive identification with the occupation.

Among the 4 factors significantly influencing occupation identity, when controlling others, "Task Complexity" alone has the highest partial regression coefficient of .253, which indicates that the more complicated task situation, the higher demands on information collection, planning, implementation and evaluation are, the higher identification with the occupation forms.

(2) Measures facilitating the transparency of one's own work and the interrelations to the work of others support to deepen vocational students' understanding of their work and its value and significance, which ought to promote the development of occupational identity (Heinemman &Rauner, 2008). Though the current research fails to verify this theoretical postulation as well as the influential role of "Task Variety", their effect should not be ignored. Possible reasons for the non-significant influences could be that the sample students in this research go through workplace training lack of task variety and measures facilitating transparency, with the comparative lower average score of "Transparency" (M=14.80 out of 20) and "Task Variety" (M=11.03 out of 15). Repetitive work tasks are verified empirically to restrict the learning potential of workplace (Fuller&Unwin, 2011).

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Occupational status and workplace training influence vocational students' occupational identity, while the quality of workplace training has greater influence compared with occupational status. This illustrates the importance of workplace training, and meanwhile challenges the conventional Chinese views of the decisive role that occupational status plays on individual's occupational identity. In the circumstance that graduates of vocational education mainly step into the secondary labor market and occupies with relatively low status, well-designed workplace training could overcome the limitations and positively influence vocational students' occupational identity to a large extent.

Furthermore, factors regarding the quality of workplace training, such as "Expert Culture", "Match of tasks with competence", "Task Complexity" and "Autonomy", have significant positive influences on vocational students' occupational identity. "Transparency" and "Task Variety" ought to but fail to influence occupational identity in this study. Possible reasons could be that workplace training for the sample students is lack of task variety and measures facilitating transparency.

Workplace Training should take into account the variety of tasks and measures for transparency. How to systematically design workplace training so as to promote the development of vocational students' occupational identity might be explored in further research.

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