
NEWSLETTER

Preference for General over Vocational Tracks: An Investigation Based on a Survey of 21,531 Junior Secondary Students from Three Autonomous Prefectures

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THIS STUDY aims to investigate the issue of preference for general over vocational tracks (PFGOVT) at the senior secondary education level in ethnic minority areas as well as the underlying reasons. The research team conducted a survey of 21,531 ninth-grade students from three autonomous prefectures where ethnic minority populations predominate, namely, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, and Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province. The survey was preceded by in-person interviews with certain numbers of junior secondary students, parents, teachers, and local educational officials.

Research Findings:

- PFGOVT was pervasive among junior secondary school graduates in the three prefectures, for whom attending general senior secondary schools was invariably the first choice. More than half of the students surveyed expressed a strong determination to pursue the general senior secondary track, and nearly 30 of them would accept the secondary vocational education as a last resort only when they failed to enter general high schools.
- Factors, including gender, family residence location, paternal occupation, maternal educational level, household income level, and academic performance ranking, significantly affected the degree of PFGOVT of each individual student.
- Primary reasons for students' unwillingness to pursue vocational education included the uncertainties in finding employment with a vocational school degree, worries about increasing financial burdens on their parents, the undesirable quality of current vocational education, poor discipline management of secondary vocational schools, low pay for secondary vocational graduates, low social recognition of practical skills, and social discrimination against vocational students.

Based on its findings, the study proposes the following recommendations: (i) Schools, governments at all levels, and the media should actively disseminate information about recent developments in secondary vocational education to increase the public knowledge of the prospects of personal de-

velopment as secondary vocational students. (ii) Measures should be taken to address the specific reasons for students' reluctance to pursue the vocational track, including increasing investment in secondary vocational education, creating more employment opportunities for vocational graduates, and raising the income levels of secondary vocational graduates; (iii) Career planning training should be encouraged in primary and secondary schools to enhance the appeal of the vocational track.

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