

Research on the employment education pathways for higher vocational students from the perspective of interaction ritual chains

Lijun YIN*

Shanghai Technical Institute of Electronics & Information, Shanghai 201411, China

*Corresponding Author

Email address: 1418863349@qq.com

Abstract: Employment is vital to public well-being and social stability. As digital natives, higher vocational students bring new challenges to traditional employment education. Based on interaction ritual chains theory, this study constructs a practice-oriented employment education framework with four core dimensions: situational context, emotional engagement, belief consolidation, and behavioral reinforcement. By creating ritualized employment scenarios, stimulating professional emotions, consolidating value beliefs, and strengthening proactive behaviors, a closed-loop interactive education chain is formed. This approach promotes the transformation of students from passive job seekers to active career builders and enhances the career initiative of students. It provides a valuable reference for improving the effectiveness of employment education in higher vocational colleges.

Keywords: interaction ritual chains; ritual; higher vocational students

1 Introduction

At present, post-00s students constitute the main body of higher vocational colleges. Having grown up in an era when the Internet is deeply embedded in daily life, they are typical "digital natives". This group is characterized by diverse access to information, open values and flexible behaviors [1-2]. Meanwhile, they emphasize practical experience, prefer intuitive expression. In terms of career awareness, employment motivation and career planning, some students hold a passive attitude of "waiting, relying and demanding"; they feel anxious and confused when facing the complex employment market; they underestimate the value of technical and skilled posts, showing a utilitarian tendency of "valuing treatment over development". The underlying root of these problems lies in the insufficient activation of students' subjective consciousness of employment, and the ineffective establishment of value connection between individual career choices and the needs of social and national development. How to transform abstract employment values into perceptible, experiential and internalized forms according to the cognitive characteristics of vocational college students, and stimulate their endogenous motivation for employment, has become an urgent practical problem for employment-oriented education in higher vocational colleges [3].

As a special form of education, ritual provides a unique perspective for solving the above problems. Rituals can, at specific temporal and spatial nodes, exert strong situational influence and value appeal through symbolic signs and emotional arousal, enabling participants to accomplish value identification and behavioral adjustment in a collective

atmosphere. Based on the above analysis, this paper introduces the interaction ritual chains theory from sociology, aiming to provide theoretical reference and practical enlightenment for enhancing the effectiveness of employment education in higher vocational colleges.

2 Intrinsic compatibility between interaction ritual chains and employment education for vocational college students

2.1 Core essence of the interaction ritual chains theory

The theory of interaction ritual chains was systematically proposed by American sociologist Randall Collins (2014)[4]. He argued that "all human interaction occurs within a certain context, involving at least an encounter composed of two individuals". Through physical co-presence, mutual focus of attention, and emotional bonding, interaction generates emotional energy, and connects emotions with symbolic symbols, thereby constructing organizational beliefs, moral norms, and cultural identification.

The essence of ritual education lies exactly in transforming abstract values into perceptible, experiential, and internalizable educational forms through the above mechanisms of interaction ritual chains. Specifically, ritual education creates a specific ritual situation to form a common focus for participants; stimulates emotional resonance to achieve emotional bonding among individuals; and employs symbols to embed and solidify values into participants' beliefs and behaviors. Therefore, the interaction ritual chains theory not only explains how rituals influence individuals, but also provides a systematic analytical framework for the effective application of rituals in employment education.

2.2 Practical demands of employment education and group characteristics of vocational college students

Vocational college students demonstrate distinctive group traits. As digital natives, they prefer fragmented information and instant interaction over one-way indoctrination; they favor practical learning over theoretical instruction. Most of them will take up frontline technical and service positions closely connected with industrial development, and uphold the spirit of serving the country through skills, yet many lack career initiative and require stronger value recognition and professional pride.

These features necessitate a shift from traditional employment education toward situational and experiential approaches. Interaction ritual chains theory offers a new framework: through symbolic resources and emotional arousal, rituals create immersive situational influence and value guidance, helping students clarify career orientation, consolidate employment beliefs via emotional resonance, and improve employability in behavioral practice.

2.3 Multidimensional compatibility between interaction ritual chains and employment education

The intrinsic compatibility between the interaction ritual chains theory and employment education for vocational college students is reflected in three dimensions: 1. Process compatibility. The gradual progression from situation to behavior in rituals is highly consistent with the educational law of integrating knowledge and practice in employment education. 2. Mechanism compatibility. Emotional energy formed through collective attention and emotional bonding integrates scattered individuals into a collective with shared value orientation. 3. Carrier compatibility. Abstract employment concepts are transformed into perceptible concrete forms relying on symbolic symbols, which satisfies vocational college students' preference for intuitive experience.

3 Systematic construction of employment education paths for vocational college students from the perspective of interaction ritual chains

3.1 Creating ritual situations with symbolic symbols

Interaction ritual chains begin with situation construction. As Collins proposed, interaction rituals rely on a shared context where participants develop mutual attention and emotional solidarity. Such a context represents a meaning-rich

field shaped by symbolic resources rather than a mere physical space. In vocational college employment education, symbolic resources—including professional attire, corporate logos, industry role models, and labor scenes—embody professional spirit, labor value, and social responsibility.

Accordingly, vocational colleges should establish a three-stage progressive ritual situation system corresponding to student development: vocational cognition at enrollment, vocational immersion during training, and career initiation at graduation. Spatially, an integrated online-offline ritual space should be built. Offline, physical venues such as role model walls and craftsmanship corridors enhance environmental ritual. Online, virtual ceremonies via campus networks and official WeChat accounts extend ritual coverage beyond temporal and spatial limits.

3.2 Stimulating moral emotions through emotional bonding

The core mechanism of interaction ritual chains lies in emotional bonding. Participants achieve emotional resonance through shared attention and generate sustained emotional energy, which acts as a lasting motivator for individual behavior [5]. For employment education, stimulating students' professional mission and social responsibility at the emotional level is essential, as employment represents not only livelihood but also social participation and value contribution.

Vocational colleges can create emotionally resonant ritual themes, such as "craftsmanship dreams" and "serving the nation through skills" to inspire respect for labor, professional pride, and a sense of mission. To achieve effective emotional engagement, multiple ritual tools—including narrative storytelling, visual media, solemn music, and collective oaths—can be integrated to focus and amplify positive emotions, fostering strong emotional resonance among students.

3.3 Solidifying value beliefs through repeated practice

Belief formation relies on repeated practical reinforcement [6]. According to interaction ritual chains theory, repeated ritual participation transforms emotional energy into stable symbols and further consolidates individual value beliefs. For vocational students, this iterative mechanism is consistent with their skill-learning habits and conducive to value cultivation.

Accordingly, vocational colleges can build a full-cycle employment ritual chain: vocational cognition rituals in the first year, post cognition rituals in the second year, and career initiation rituals in the third year, forming a spirally progressive process. To sustain and deepen ritual effects, coordination with employment guidance courses and internship practices is required. Ritual values are embedded into the curriculum, and ritual activities are designed to feature spiral progression across stages, achieving synergistic integration of rituals, courses, and practices.

3.4 Strengthening positive employment behaviors through positive feedback

Behavioral reinforcement serves as the practical foundation and final link of interaction ritual chains in employment education. It enhances students' employment initiatives through affirmation, recognition, and demonstration. For vocational students, ritualized public recognition can effectively motivate proactive employment behavior.

In practice, vocational colleges can establish hierarchical and classified employment recognition rituals, including honors for employment pioneers, high-quality employment stars, and those engaged in grassroots work serving national strategies. Each ritual reflects a clear value orientation and forms a diversified behavioral demonstration system. Combining immediate daily feedback with ritualized recognition enables dual reinforcement. Collective attention and positive evaluation in rituals create a normative climate that encourages students to learn from role models and optimize their employment orientation.

4 Value sublimation of ritual-based education

4.1 Identity reconstruction in rituals

The profound goal of employment education for vocational college students is to facilitate their identity

transformation from passive recipients to active participants. In the specific context created by rituals, students are endowed with identity roles such as quasi-professionals, era builders, and contributors to national development through skills. This process of identity reconstruction essentially constitutes the awakening of students' subjective consciousness. For vocational college students, such identity reconstruction holds particular practical significance. Over the long term, social prejudices against vocational education have tended to induce inferiority complex and identity anxiety among students. Rituals precisely offer an opportunity to break this psychological constraint. Taking the induction oath ceremony as an example, when students take the solemn oath, their identity recognition undergoes a qualitative transformation—they are no longer students who failed to gain admission to undergraduate programs, but professionals about to contribute to national development through skills.

4.2 Synchronization of individual choices with the times

Vocational college students acquire applied skills and will engage in frontline production and service positions, which are closely linked to national industrial development. Rituals can help students establish a value connection between individual career choices and the process of era development. In rituals, by showcasing national development achievements and industrial transformation trends, students develop cognition and recognition of the current era through emotional engagement. When students perceive the alignment between their majors and national strategic needs, as well as the intersection between personal development and contemporary opportunities, employment is no longer an anxious choice but an open future full of possibilities. This value connection between individuals and the times endows career choices with deeper significance and injects lasting motivation into students' professional development.

4.3 Stimulation of endogenous employment motivation

The ultimate test of employment education lies in students' actual employment behaviors. Through emotional arousal, value internalization, and behavioral reinforcement of ritual-based education, students can gradually achieve the behavioral orientation transformation from "passive job hunting" to "active employment pursuit". This transformation is reflected in three dimensions: at the cognitive level, students shift from regarding employment as a graduation task to a life issue; at the attitudinal level, from passively waiting for opportunities to actively creating opportunities; at the behavioral level, from hesitating to taking proactive actions. Although ritual-based education cannot directly solve the problem of employment vacancies, it can enhance employment motivation at the value level, encouraging students to actively submit resumes, participate in interviews, and adapt to the workplace. The stimulation of such endogenous motivation is the core value of ritual-based education.

5 Conclusion

Employment education for vocational college students is a systematic and long-term project. The theory of interaction ritual chains provides a theoretical and practical approach to addressing current problems in employment education, such as monotonous forms and weak behavioral motivation. Based on the core mechanisms of interaction ritual chains, this paper systematically constructs four interrelated and closed-loop paths for employment education: situation creation, emotional stimulation, belief solidification, and behavioral reinforcement, which offer an operable practical scheme for higher vocational colleges to implement employment education.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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About the author

Lijun Yin (born June 1991), female, Han nationality, native of Tai'an, Shandong Province. She holds a master's degree and is a teaching assistant. Her research focuses on employment and ritual education.