The Factors Influencing High-Level Talent Turnover in China's Higher Vocational Colleges

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the increasing turnover rate of high-level talents has become a significant obstacle to improving the talent competitiveness of higher vocational colleges and the quality of higher vocational education. This study aims to discover the internal motivational and external driving factors of brain drain. This study adopts a qualitative research method, selects a higher vocational institution in Shanxi Province, China, as a case study, uses purposive sampling and conducts one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 20 relevant personnel to obtain relevant information about the factors of brain drain. The research findings show that the internal motivational factors leading to the attrition of high-level talents are development needs, family and life needs, psychological factors, and moral character, while external driving factors mainly include regional gap and external competition, work environment, policies and systems, salary and benefits. The managers of higher vocational institutions can refer to these factors to develop corresponding measures to solve the problem of brain drain. This study still has certain limitations in terms of research scope and interviewee scope. Based on the experience of conducting this study, four recommendations are proposed for further research.

Keywords: China, higher vocational colleges, high-level talents turnover, turnover factors

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

With the development of science and technology, vocational education is receiving increasing attention from the country (Ma, 2019). Higher vocational colleges are the main institutions of vocational education in China and the main force of vocational education. The Chinese government has been supporting the development of vocational education by providing policy support, financial funds, and other forms of assistance to higher vocational institutions to promote their growth (Dong et al., 2020). Since entering the 21st century, the Chinese government has mainly explored and promoted the rapid development of higher vocational education through the "policy+" model (Zheng et al., 2023).

On January 24, 2019, the State Council issued the "Implementation Plan for National Vocational Education Reform", proposing to launch and implement the plan for the construction of higher vocational schools and majors with Chinese characteristics (State Council of China, 2019). On December 18, 2019, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance officially announced the list of higher vocational schools and professional construction units with Chinese characteristics (China Ministry of Education & Ministry of Finance, 2019). The launch and implementation of the "Double High Plan" is the latest strategic measure for the country to promote

vocational education reform and development, and is an effective confirmation of the educational attributes of vocational education types (Liu & He, 2020). With the launch and implementation of the "Double High Plan", the important position and role of vocational education are becoming increasingly prominent. In addition, connotation construction will be the top priority in the construction of vocational colleges (Zhang, 2024). The construction of the teaching staff is one of the top ten construction tasks of the "Double High Plan" (Luo & Liu, 2023), and it is also a key factor determining the development of the school (Wang, 2020). Talents are an important guarantee for the comprehensive strength and core competitiveness of colleges, and are the driving force for their development (Yang & Cheng, 2019). The role of high-level talents in promoting the development of vocational colleges and enhancing their competitiveness is becoming increasingly prominent (Sun & Zhang, 2023). For vocational institutions, a high-level talent teacher team with high professional titles, high education levels, and high levels is particularly important (Qiu, 2019). Many colleges also regard cultivating high-level talents as a top priority for their own development (Li, 2021). Therefore, in order to attract more and more outstanding high-level talents, various regions are vigorously introducing policies to attract talents, and colleges are also competing to implement the strategy of strengthening the school with talents, enriching the teaching staff, and improving the comprehensive strength of the school (Li, 2021).

Problem Statement

The turnover of high-level talents is not a new issue (Li & Wang, 2020). With the proposal and implementation of the "Double High Plan", on the one hand, it has brought more resources and development opportunities to vocational institutions (Yang, 2020), but on the other hand, talent competition among colleges in various regions has accelerated the flow of high-level talents (Sun & Zhang, 2023), and all vocational colleges have experienced varying degrees of talent turnover (Ma, 2019). The mobility of highly skilled employees significantly affects the organizational performance and job satisfaction of the remaining employees (Park & Shaw, 2013). The departure of employees may lead to low morale among other members of the organization, resulting in loss and waste of human resource investment costs. Therefore, resignation has become a focus of discussion for many organizations, especially among managers and theoretical researchers (Jusoh & Yue, 2019).

In China, many scholars have conducted relevant research on the issue of brain drain in vocational colleges. They studied specific regions or schools in China and found through research that there is indeed a serious phenomenon of talent turnover in these regions or schools. The high-level talents they have invested a lot of manpower, material resources, and financial resources to introduce are unwilling to stay in their positions (Pi, 2021), which affects the stability of people's hearts, daily teaching work (Li & Zhang, 2020), the stability of their teaching staff and the overall competitiveness of the school (Pi, 2022), the overall education level and talent reserve of the region, and even the overall development of vocational education in China (Yang, 2020; Liu, 2020; Xu, 2023; Ye, 2024; Liu, 2021). Therefore, the turnover of high-level talents is an important issue that urgently needs to be addressed in the field of vocational education. Effectively preventing brain drain has become an extremely important and arduous task in the construction of talent teams in various vocational colleges (Li & Zhang, 2020). The positive effort to retain employees depends on the organization's ability to understand why employees choose to continue working for the employer (Cohen, 2013; Harrison & Gordon, 2014). Therefore, in order to prevent talent turnover, the first thing to do is to identify the reasons for talent turnover, so that targeted measures can be proposed to solve the problem of brain drain.

Research Objective

This study aims to understand the current situation of high-level talents turnover in Chinese higher vocational institutions, explore the factors that affect the turnover of high-level talents through case study, and provide theoretical support and practical suggestions for improving talent stability and optimizing talent management. The specific research objectives is to identify the internal motivational factors and external driving factors of

high-level talents turnover in higher vocational colleges, and clarify the mechanism of action between internal motivational factors and external driving factors.

Research Question

What is the current situation of high-level talent turnover in vocational institutions, and what are the factors leading to the turnover of high-level talent? How to effectively prevent brain drain is an extremely important and difficult task in the construction of talent team in higher vocational colleges, which is worth pondering and urgently needs to be solved. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher answered what are the internal motivational factors and external driving factors that lead to the turnover of high-level talents, and how they interact to influence talent turnover.

Conceptual Framework

The main concepts of this study are higher vocational colleges, high-level talents, and talent turnover. This study will explore the factors that affect the turnover of high-level talents, as well as how internal motivational factors and external driving factors affect the talent turnover. Researcher developed a conceptual framework to demonstrate their relationship, as shown in Figure 1.
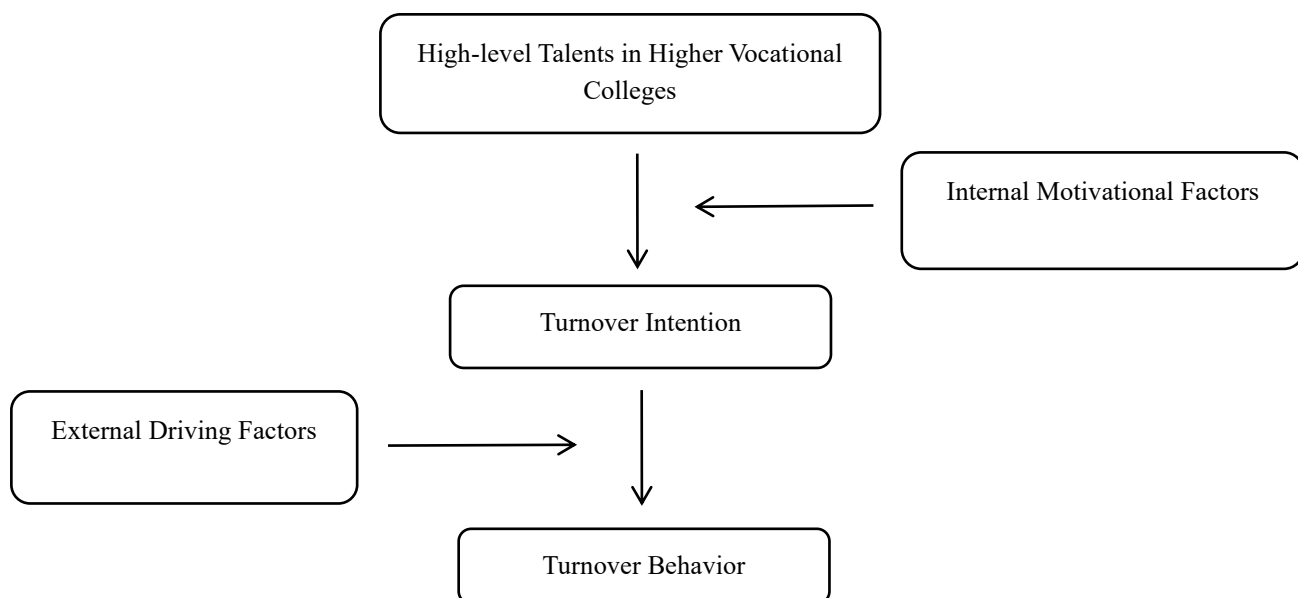

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The relationship between various concepts can be seen from Figure 1. High level talents in vocational colleges are driven by internal motivational factors and external driving factors. Under the influence of internal motivation factors, high-level talents have the intention to leave, and under the promotion of external driving factors, it ultimately leads to turnover behavior.

Significance of the Study

Most academic research focuses on the analysis of talent turnover in the traditional sense and context. This study takes China's latest "Double High Plan" as the research background, analyzes the motivation and driving factors of high-level talent turnover in vocational institutions, and has important theoretical and practical value. At the theoretical level, the study combines the unique educational environment and organizational characteristics of vocational colleges, deeply analyzes the internal motivational factors and external driving factors of talent turnover, supplements and improves the theoretical system of high-level talent management in vocational

education, and promotes the localization development and innovation of human resource management theory in vocational colleges. At the same time, a systematic analysis framework for the factors contributing to the turnover of high-level talents in vocational colleges has been constructed, providing an empirical basis for subsequent academic research. At the practical level, this study identifies the key factors that affect the high-level talents outflow, which helps vocational colleges optimize management strategies from the system level, cultural atmosphere, career development, and other aspects, enhance the attractiveness and stickiness of excellent teachers, provide decision-making references for vocational colleges to optimize talent attraction mechanisms, stabilize teacher teams, and enhance core competitiveness, and also provide practical basis for education authorities to formulate relevant policies, such as professional title system reform and income distribution incentives. Through this study, it helps to promote the rational flow and optimal allocation of higher vocational teacher talents, and promote the high-quality development of vocational education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In April 2019, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance of China issued the "Opinions on the Implementation of the Plan for the Construction of Higher Vocational Colleges and Majors with Chinese Characteristics", proposing to "focus on building about 50 higher vocational institutions and about 150 high-level specialised clusters" (China Ministry of Education & Ministry of Finance, 2019). Gao (2023) commented in the People's Daily that the construction of a number of higher vocational schools and majors clusters that lead reforms, support development, have Chinese characteristics, and are of world-class level is an important initiative to promote the deepening of reforms in vocational education and to achieve high-quality development.

Introducing and cultivating high-level talents is the need to cultivate high-quality technical and skilled talents, the need for connotative development of higher vocational colleges, and the need to implement national policies (Gu et al., 2022). The "Double High Plan" proposed to build a high-level "dual teacher" team, and high-level talents, as the "ballast stone" for the development of higher vocational colleges, are the key to building a high-level "dual teacher" team (Sun & Zeng, 2022). Therefore, various regions have introduced policies for talent introduction, and colleges are competing to implement the strategy of strengthening colleges with talents to attract more and better high-level talents and enrich the teaching force (Li, 2021). However, due to the utilitarian introduction method and competitive poaching method, it has led to the disorderly flow of high-level talents (Li, 2020), and the problem of high-level talent turnover has gradually come to the fore (Liang, 2021). Despite the country has issued some systems and taken some measures to further regulate the rational and orderly competition and flow of talents, but the results have been minimal, failing to fundamentally solve the irrational and disorderly phenomenon of high-level talent competition (Hu, 2024), most provinces in the central and western regions are still experiencing large-scale brain drain (Li & Wang, 2020).

The researcher used "loss of high-level talents in higher vocational colleges", "talent management in higher vocational colleges" and "construction of high-level talent team in higher vocational colleges" as search terms, and searched from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure and WanFang Data to find some scholars' relevant studies on this phenomenon of brain drain in the past five years. They have conducted some research on the problem of high-level talent drain from the aspects of the types of loss, the characteristics of loss, loss factors, governance measures and preventive mechanisms.

According to some scholars, there are three main types of turnover: vertical and horizontal turnover, within-system and cross-system turnover, explicit and implicit turnover. Vertical turnover refers to the flow of low-level regions or colleges to high-level regions or colleges. Due to the consistently lower levels of education and economic development in the western region compared to the eastern region, there has been a significant outflow of talents from the western region (Song, 2020). Horizontal turnover refers to high-level talents leaving colleges

for various reasons and flowing to other organizations or industries (Yan, 2022). Zhang (2020) believes that talent mobility can be classified into intra-organizational flow and inter-organizational flow based on whether the service recipients have changed. Some talents only move between different colleges and universities, while others move between colleges, businesses, and governments (Zhou & Lou, 2020). Some scholars mentioned that the talent turnover includes explicit turnover and implicit turnover. Chen (2022) believes that explicit brain drain is the voluntary departure of talents, and implicit brain drain is that they are not working in their positions. Song (2022) talked about that explicit turnover refers to the temporary or permanent departure from colleges to work elsewhere, which is a de facto loss. Implicit turnover manifests as "passive slackness", with the intention of leaving colleges and a "try it out" attitude towards one's own job. Intention of leaving is considered a precursor to employee turnover (Aladwan et al., 2013). It is also manifested in the lack of enthusiasm and innovation among talents who have not resigned, and who devote most of their time and energy to work outside of their main job (Gao, 2024). Li (2021) found through research that many high-level talents have problems such as inaccurate self positioning, personal belief bias, family and economic pressures, which make them unable to work with peace of mind and lead to hidden loss of talents. Any of the forms of turnover is not conducive to the development of the school.

Wei (2019) mentioned that colleges and universities in China's western region are facing the pressure of talent loss. On the one hand, it is due to the influence of geographical factors, and on the other hand, it is due to the lack of advanced management concepts and scientific talent management methods in colleges and universities in the central and western regions, or the lack of advanced scientific research equipment. Li and Zhang (2020) analysed the causes of brain drain in terms of both external objective factors and internal demand factors. Zhang (2020) believes that there are many reasons for the loss of talent in vocational colleges, in addition to deficiencies in management mechanisms, and also because the management ideology has not yet fully broken through the constraints of outdated consciousness. Pi (2021) analysed the reasons for the loss of high-level talents in terms of geographical conditions, welfare benefits and social status. Li (2021) argued that due to the differences in the level of economic development of the regions, and the gap with other general universities, higher vocational institutions lack the competitiveness, resulting in most talents flowing to other universities or training institutions with better conditions and stronger competitiveness. Sun and Zeng (2022) talked about the problem of talent turnover to varying degrees due to the influence of traditional concepts and unclear assessment and management standards in some higher vocational institutions. Chu, Guo, and Sun (2022) analysed the reasons for the loss of high-level talents in colleges from the aspects of social environment, colleges themselves and personal factors. Stamolampros et al. (2019) concluded that career development opportunities are also crucial for employee turnover intention. Chen (2022) analysed the influencing factors of senior title brain drain in higher vocational colleges from three aspects: internal school, external environment and individual. He believes that the internal management mechanism of colleges is not sound, the salary and welfare treatment is unreasonable, or the personal development needs can not be met are the reasons that lead to the departure of talents. Gao (2024) believes that the problem of talent loss in colleges is related to various factors such as human resource management methods, execution of management work, salary and benefits, and sense of belonging. Gatling et al. (2016) argue that organizational commitment is one of the most important and sensitive attitudes of employees towards their organizations, and its negative impact can lead to employee turnover. According to Haldorai et al. (2019), excessive workload, interpersonal tension, and work-life conflict are positively correlated with turnover intention. These studies shows that the problem of talent drain is closely related to a variety of factors and is the result of a combination of factors (Liu, 2019). Moreover, due to the significant impact of resignation on their lives, families, and careers, they usually choose to leave after careful consideration, and therefore may show more or less willingness to resign before officially leaving (Arokiasamy, 2013). Mobley (1977) pointed out that intention to resign is the most direct indicator of resignation, and corresponding measures can be implemented to reduce employee turnover by predicting possible factors that may affect future employee turnover in the organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts qualitative research method. Qualitative method is a rigorous and systematic approach that focuses on observing or narrating the experiences of participants to explore complex phenomena and gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the problem (Wong et al., 2017).

Research design is of great significance as it can effectively guide the specific steps and directions of the research process, helping researchers achieve their research objectives when analyzing data (Yin, 2009). Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the turnover of high-level talents in vocational institutions, it is necessary to conduct a scientific and systematic research design for this study. On the one hand, the problem of high-level talent outflow is complex and multidimensional, involving multiple levels, and a single perspective is difficult to fully reveal its internal logic. By carefully designing research plans, such as clarifying research subjects, adopting appropriate research methods, analytical methods, etc., the systematicity and logicality of research can be improved, ensuring the controllability of the research process. On the other hand, a reasonable research design can help improve the reliability and validity of research results, making the conclusions obtained more convincing and practical, and providing reliable basis for vocational colleges to formulate targeted talent management strategies. Therefore, conducting rigorous research design is not only the foundation for ensuring research quality, but also a key link in achieving research goals and generating dual social and academic value.

To scientifically explore the influencing factors of high-level talent turnover in vocational institutions and ensure the systematic and effective research process, researcher conducted research path planning and systematically elaborated the overall research design. The research design is mainly divided into two stages. The first stage is literature research, which lays the theoretical foundation. The second stage is research implementation, conducting data collection and analysis. The research framework of this study is shown in Figure 2.
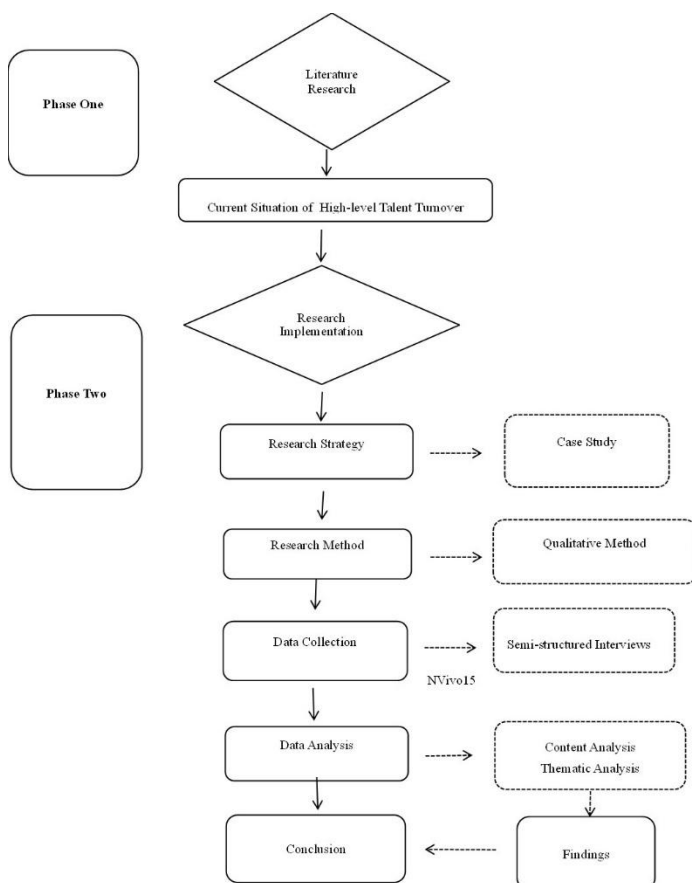

Figure 2. Research Framework

Phase one, literature research. In the design process of this study, literature research was taken as the primary step, aiming to lay a theoretical and practical foundation for subsequent research. By systematically reviewing relevant literature on the flow and turnover of high-level talents in higher vocational colleges both domestically and internationally, researcher can comprehensively understand the current research status, existing research results, and existing research gaps in this field, thus defining research questions more scientifically and selecting appropriate research path. Researcher reviewed research results related to "talent mobility," "talent turnover," and "vocational education talent management" in databases such as CNKI and Wanfang, in order to understand the situation of high-level talent drain in vocational colleges, especially the phenomenon of brain drain faced by vocational colleges in the context of the "dual high" construction, and provide practical basis for proposing problems.

Phase two, research implication. On the basis of completing the preliminary literature research, the research design enters the second stage, which is the specific implementation research stage. The core task of this stage is to scientifically and reasonably determine research strategy, research method, data collection method, and analysis method around research objective and queation, ensuring that the research process is logical, operable, and scientific.

Research strategy. The turnover of high-level talents in higher vocational institutions is a complex social phenomenon. Case study is suitable for studying complex social phenomena, and answers the questions such as "why", "what" and "how" (Yin, 2018). Therefore, this study adopts a case study method, selects representative vocational college, and provides a detailed description and in-depth analysis of the factors and their interactions that affect the turnover of high-level talents. Through a detailed analysis of the reasons for brain drain in specific case school, it can provide strong support for understanding and solving the problem of high-level talent turnover, and help higher vocational colleges propose targeted measures based on specific turnover factors to prevent and reduce the loss of high-level talents. In this study, the researcher selected a higher vocational college in Shanxi Province as a case for research. Firstly, the Shanxi province where the case school is located has its unique regional economic and policy environment. Research on this school can reveal the unique regional characteristics of talent loss and provide reference for other similar regions. Secondly, the college has a certain influence and reputation among financial and economic colleges in Shanxi Province and even across the country. Choosing such a school as a case study can ensure the reliability and applicability of the research results. Thirdly, this college is facing a widespread and representative problem of high-level talent loss. Fourthly, the collaboration between the author and the school provides great convenience for the conduct of research and the collection of data.

Research Method. This study selected qualitative research method. Qualitative method is a rigorous and systematic approach that focuses on observing or narrating the experiences of participants to explore complex phenomena (Wong et al., 2017). The key to qualitative research is to choose the most appropriate method to help researchers answer questions about the research being conducted (Patton, 2023). Therefore, in order to achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher chose the interview method to collect information on the turnover of high-level talents and explore the reasons for the turnover of high-level talents. The interview method is commonly used to collect the thoughts, experiences, etc. of specific groups regarding specific events. Through interviews, the researcher can understand the respondents' views on complex and emerging things (Liu et al., 2020). Therefore, in this study, the researcher selected experienced and representative interviewees, designed a semi-structured interview outline, conducted one-on-one interviews with the interviewees, and recorded the interview content. Through the sharing of experiences by the participants, the researcher obtained information and data on the turnover of high-level talents. The researcher explored the motivations and driving factors behind the turnover of high-level talents in higher vocational colleges by collecting and analyzing information and related data on the turnover of high-level talents in the case college.

Data Collection. The selection of the target population is based on the research questions and research objectives

and is a key step in the research design. The target population is not randomly selected individuals, but a collection of individuals with certain common features and attributes that make them the best representatives for the research problem (Creswell, 2014). The target population has characteristics of specificity, representativeness, accessibility, heterogeneity or homogeneity (Flick, 2018). The target population of this study was selected from higher vocational colleges, mainly including: (a) high-level talents from higher vocational colleges, including those who have already resigned or plan to resign, (b) administrators from personnel departments and other relevant management departments of higher vocational institutions, (c) colleagues of talents. The inclusion criteria included high-level talents who had worked at higher vocational institutions but had left or were interested in resigning, management staff with more than two years of experience in talent management, and talent colleagues who were familiar with these talents.

In qualitative studies, the sample size should be sufficient to achieve saturation (Patton, 2023). Generally, qualitative research has a small sample size and focuses on obtaining information that can be used to understand events related to the research topic (Gentles et al., 2015). The researcher used inclusion and exclusion criteria to minimize the number of participants. In this study, since the target population is both homogeneous and heterogeneous, the researcher determined the sample size as 20 people, including 10 high-level talents who have left or have the intention to resign, six administrators from personnel departments and other relevant management departments, and four colleagues of talents. A sample size of 20 persons not only ensures the diversity of the study population and provides sufficient data for in-depth analyses, but also make resources and time controllable, facilitating the completion of data collection and analyses within an acceptable time and resource range. At the same time, a sample of 20 persons usually allows for data saturation, thus ensuring the adequacy and completeness of the study.

Once the appropriate sample size has been determined, it is necessary to choose the most suitable sampling technique to answer the research question. Non-probability sampling is usually used in qualitative research, selecting samples based on the subjective judgment of the researcher to provide rich information (Saunders et al., 2019). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to consciously select knowledgeable and appropriate people to participate in cases of interest (Etikan et al., 2016). This study adopts qualitative research, therefore non-probability sampling, purposive sampling is suitable for this study. Purposive sampling ensures that the sample is representative and increases the richness and depth of the data, and the sample selected provides insights in depth and nuance, enabling the researcher to fully understand the complexity of the phenomenon (Patton, 2023). Through purposive sampling, the researcher can collect the most valuable data with limited resources and time, thus increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the study.

In this qualitative study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to conduct one-on-one interviews with participants and used open-ended questions to collect data. Interview is an important data collection method in qualitative research. It allows for raw data such as detailed and in-depth insights and experiences to be gained through direct interaction with the research participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It also offers a great deal of flexibility, allowing questions to be adapted in real time based on respondents' answers to delve deeper into topics of interest (Patton, 2023). The researcher conducted the interviews with the participants at a time, place and manner they considered appropriate. The researcher developed a semi-structured interview protocol which contributed to the objectivity and credibility of the study (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview protocol includes the introduction to the study, description of the interview plan and logistics, interview questions, follow-up arrangements, and notes. The researcher conducted the interview with the participant according to the interview protocol and guided the interview process. To improve the accuracy of the data, the researcher prepared audio recording devices for the interviews, recorded the participants' voices, and named each recording to keep the data organized. After each interview, the researcher carefully transcribed each recording and sent the transcripts to the participants for member checking and confirmation of the interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the interviews.

Data Analysis. Data analysis in qualitative research is an iterative and interpretive process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It ensures the completeness and availability of data by collecting and organizing non-numerical data such as text, images, etc., initial coding of the data, identifying important concepts, combining similar codes into themes, discovering and identifying major patterns and relationships in the data through comparison, interpreting the meaning behind the data so as to understand the deeper meaning of the phenomenon under study (Miles et al, 2014) and presenting the results in the form of text, graphs and other forms to clearly present the results of the analyses. In this study, the researcher used content analysis and thematic analysis methods to analyse the collected data. Content analysis method is mainly used to systematically describe and interpret textual data (Krippendorff, 2018), which can help the researcher to identify key themes and reveal hidden influences from a large amount of textual data (Bengtsson, 2016). Through content analysis, qualitative data is transformed into quantifiable information (Neuendorf, 2019), which helps researcher to be more objective when analyzing and interpreting data, and adds credibility to the results. Thematic analysis is a specific strategy for analyzing semi-structured interview data. By scrutinizing the data, researchers summarize and organize the content of the data collected, identify hidden common themes and clearly describe each theme, explaining the meaning behind the data and the connections to the research questions (Neuendorf, 2019). Thematic analysis also emphasizes the systematic and transparent nature of the analysis process, increasing the credibility and authenticity of the data analysis through iterative comparison and validation. This is important to ensure the reliability and validity of research findings (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The factors of high-level brain drain are a complex phenomenon involving multiple dimensions. Thematic analysis method can help researchers to understand these complex phenomena and analyse them.

By collecting and transcribing data, familiarizing oneself with the data, Preliminary coding, categorizing, and naming themes, presenting and interpreting data, meaningful themes are extracted to understand the complex reasons for the turnover of high-level talents. The researcher used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo15 to code and categorize the data to help organize and analyse the data and get an interpretation of the data. The researcher shared her interpretation of the data with the participants and solicited their feedback. By having participants validate the study, conclusions can be drawn about whether the researcher presented the information accurately (Cope, 2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were derived from the researcher's use of NVivo15 software, content analysis and thematic analysis to accurately illustrate the experiences and perceptions of the 20 participants on high-level brain drain. The research findings were described using exact statements and representations from the interview transcripts that were approved by the research participants for the salient themes and ideas.

Description of Sample

The researcher contacted the case college by phone, which indicated a willingness to participate in the study and arranged for the researcher to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria to provide their experience or experiences to answer the research questions. The researcher scheduled interviews based on the participants' convenience, transcribed and organized the audio recordings of each interview, and gave them to each participant to review. Participants made revisions to the interviews or added responses to additional questions posed by the interviewer. The researcher used participant-approved data for analysis. Meanwhile, in order to ensure the anonymity of participants, the researcher identified each interviewee by a number and created pseudonyms IP1-IP20. IP1-IP6 represented the administrators from talent management departments. IP7-IP10 represented colleagues of these talents. IP11-IP20 represented high-level talents. Due to the different inclusion criteria, basic information of 20 participants is presented in two separate tables. The basic information of talent management personnel and talent colleagues participants is shown in Table 1, and the basic information of high-level talents

interviewees is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 1 Basic Information of Talent Management Personnel and Talent Colleagues Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Department	Working Years in Department	Administrative Position /Professional Title
IP 1	Female	42	HR Department	5	Director
IP 2	Female	45	HR Department	6	Deputy Director
IP 3	Female	39	HR Department	8	/
IP 4	Female	40	Teaching and Research Department	12	Deputy Director
IP 5	Female	31	Teaching and Research Department	6	/
IP 6	Female	30	Talent Work Department	3	/
IP 7	Female	45	Public Education Department	/	Associate professor
IP 8	Female	40	Business Department	/	Lecture
IP 9	Female	32	Information Technology Department	/	Lecture
IP 10	Female	36	Finance Department	/	Director of the Department Office

IP1-IP6 are management personnel from the Human Resources Department, Teaching and Research Department, and Talent Work Department, respectively. They are all women. Because in the talent management departments, over 80% of employees are women, and the personnel responsible for talent-related work are all women. They have been engaged in talent-related work for more than two years, with the shortest work experience being three years and the longest being 12 years. IP7-IP10 are the colleagues of talents from different teaching departments. They are also all women. Because most of the teachers in the teaching department are female in this school, and these colleagues happen to know more about talents.

Table 2 Basic Information of High-level Talents Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Professional Title	Degree	Destination
IP 11	Male	37	Lecture	Ph.D	Undergraduate university in Taiyuan, Shanxi
IP 12	Female	38	Associate professor	Ph.D	Undergraduate university in Taiyuan, Shanxi
IP 13	Female	33	Lecture	Ph.D	Public institution in Taiyuan, Shanxi
IP 14	Female	37	Lecture	Ph.D	Undergraduate university in Quzhou, Zhejiang
IP 15	Female	40	Associate professor	Master	Undergraduate university in Taiyuan, Shanxi
IP 16	Female	50	Associate professor	Ph.D	Undergraduate university in Taiyuan, Shanxi
IP 17	Male	40	Professor	Ph.D	Undergraduate university in Taiyuan, Shanxi
IP 18	Female	39	Associate professor	Ph.D	Undergraduate university in Taiyuan, Shanxi

| IP 19 | Male | 35 | Lecture | Ph.D | Undergraduate university in Taiyuan, Shanxi |
| IP 20 | Female | 43 | Lecture | Ph.D | Undergraduate university in Taiyuan, Shanxi |

IP11-IP16 are high-level talents who have already resigned. Age, professional title, and degree display the information when they left this college. Among them, 50% are associate professors, 80% are PhDs, 80% of talents have chosen undergraduate colleges in Shanxi Province, 20% entered other public institution in Shanxi Province, and one person has gone to an undergraduate college in an eastern city of China. IP17-IP20 are high-level talents who are currently employed but have the intention to resign. Among them, there is a professor and an associate professor, and all of them are PhDs.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis begins with transcribing interview records. Researcher used TONGYI transcription software to transcribe interview recordings into text, made corrections, and then submitted them to participants for review. After participant review, the researcher used NVivo15 software to encode the transcribed interview text to generate themes. The researcher imported the interview records into NVivo15, opened the interview record files one by one, browsed the interview data, identified important information related to the research question, encoded it, and dragged information with similar or identical viewpoints directly into the corresponding codes until all information related to the research question was encoded. Then, a total of 27 codes were generated. Subsequently, classify the code and merge similar codes to form themes and sub-themes. In the end, a total of two themes and eight sub-themes were generated.

The researcher analyzed and summarized two themes and eight sub-themes based on the interview responses of the participants. The factors that affect brain drain are mainly divided into internal motivational factors and external driving factors. The theme of internal motivational factors includes four sub-themes: development needs, family and life needs, psychological factors and moral character. The theme of external driving factors also includes four sub-themes: regional gap and external competition, work environment, policies and systems, salary and benefits. The summary of participants' statements on the theme and sub-themes is shown in Table 3 below. From this table, it can be seen which theme or sub-theme each participant mentioned.

Table 3 Summary of Participants' Statements on the Theme and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes	IP1	IP2	IP3	IP4	IP5	IP6	IP7	IP8	IP9	IP10	IP11	IP12	IP13	IP14	IP15	IP16	IP17	IP18	IP19	IP20
Internal Motivational Factors	Development Needs	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	Family and Life Needs	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√		√		√	√	√		
	Psychological Factors	√	√	√	√	√				√	√	√			√					√	√
	Moral Character				√		√														
External Driving Factors	Regional Gap and External Competition	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√				√	√	√
	Work Environment	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	Policies and Systems	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		√		√		√
	Salary and Benefits	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		√		√		√	√

Each theme and sub-theme will be presented and relevant supporting data will be shown. The researcher used bracketing to cite the participants' exact statements or provided brief summaries when presenting data that did not include any of her ideas, viewpoints, or experiences.

Theme 1: Internal Motivational Factors

Participants expressed their views on the internal motivational factors that influence brain drain and discussed how these factors affect brain drain. The researcher analyzed and sorted out four internal motivational factors that affect brain drain based on participants' responses, mainly including development needs, family and life needs, psychological factors, and moral character.

Sub-theme 1: Development Needs

All 20 respondents mentioned development needs, which they believe is the most important and primary factor affecting talent outflow. In the responses on the reasons for brain drain, the need for development was the most commonly mentioned factor by respondents, who believed that development needs was an inherent need for talent. Talent management personnel and colleagues also expressed that talent have a strong demand for development, the lack of development space and opportunities can lead to talent loss. Talent interviewees also mentioned that the main reason for their resignation or potential resignation is that school cannot meet their personal development needs, they feel that their career development is hindered and there is no space, opportunity, or platform for growth.

Sub-theme 2: Family and Life Needs

Most respondents mentioned the impact of family and life needs on talent turnover. They stated that family and living needs are key factors to consider when high-level talents retain or leave. Most talent management and talent colleagues respondents mentioned that considering family life is an important factor leading to brain drain, and mentioned that talents mainly consider family and life factors such as taking care of parents and children, separation of spouses, spouse employment, children's education, and pursuing a better quality of life and work environment. Ten high-level talent interviewees mentioned this aspect, among which two of them stated that their main reason for leaving their original school was due to family factors. One of them mentioned that the school cannot provide work for his spouse. Another mentioned that she chose to leave mainly for family harmony and stability. Other interviewees also discussed the impact of family and lifestyle needs on talent turnover. Talents who have the intention to resign also mentioned that they will consider this factor if they leave.

Sub-theme 3: Psychological Factors

More than half of the respondents mentioned psychological factors that affect talent turnover. Based on their statements, it was found that their viewpoints mainly focus on three psychological factors: not being valued, sense of imbalance, and herd mentality.

Some interviewees mentioned specific manifestations of not being valued, such as mismatched treatment with abilities and contributions, lack of necessary resources and support, and suggestions not being adopted. They also discussed the impact of not being valued on talents. For example, doubting one's own value, feeling lost and discouraged, becoming increasingly dissatisfied, lacking work enthusiasm and motivation, etc. The lack of emphasis on talents in school can lead to dissatisfaction among talents and easily result in talent outflow. Some of the lost talents mentioned that they chose to leave because they were not valued.

Some participants mentioned not being treated equally by school, which creates a sense of imbalance. They believe that this sense of imbalance is mainly reflected in the differences in salary, position, and treatment compared to peers, colleagues, classmates, or people in similar situations. Due to these gaps, there is a

psychological imbalance among talents, which can easily lead them to leave and search for new and better places.

Some other participants also talked about the herd mentality. They believe that talents have a herd mentality, even a comparative mentality, in their career choices. When talents see people in similar situations leaving, they also have the idea of leaving.

Sub-theme 4: Moral Character

Individual participants mentioned moral factors, believing that this is also an aspect that affects talent loss. They talked about that many talents lack love and dedication to the education industry, lack professional ethics and integrity, and only focus on pursuing economic benefits. In the end, they lost themselves under the temptation of high salaries and chose to leave.

Theme 2 : External Driving Factors

Participants expressed their views on external driving factors that affect brain drain. Based on participants' responses, external driving factors mainly include regional gap and external competition, work environment, policies and systems, salary and benefits.

Sub-theme 1: Regional Gap and External Competition

Some interviewees mentioned the gap between the eastern and western regions and provided detailed information on how these differences affect talents' selection. Some participants mentioned that the economic development level in the eastern region is much higher than that in the central and western regions. There is still a certain gap between colleges in the central and western regions and those in the eastern coastal regions in terms of educational resources, faculty strength, and economic development level. Due to these gaps, talents always choose to flow from economically underdeveloped areas to economically developed areas. Some interviewees also expressed that some vocational institutions in economically underdeveloped areas are unable to provide high salaries, good benefits, updated facilities, funding, good working environments, development platforms, and opportunities for talents.

Some interviewees also mentioned competition from outside the school. They believe that competition from external organizations has indeed had some impact on talents. Because these external organizations, such as other undergraduate universities, research institutions, and enterprises, can provide talents with higher salaries, richer academic resources, better working conditions, more growth platforms, and better development opportunities to meet their material, spiritual, and developmental needs.

Sub-theme 2: Work Environment

All interview participants mentioned the importance of the environment for talents, believing that the work environment plays a crucial role in retaining high-level talents. Based on participants' statements about the work environment, the researcher summarized two types of work environments: physical environment and non-physical environment.

Some participants discussed the impact of physical environment such as office environment, office equipment, teaching and research equipment, and campus environment on talent's work enthusiasm, work efficiency, and satisfaction to school. They mentioned that outdated office equipment and teaching and research equipment cannot meet the work needs of talents, which may affect their work enthusiasm and efficiency. Poor campus environment and facilities can affect the satisfaction of talents with the school. All of these may lead to talent outflow.

Participants also discussed the impact of non-physical environment on talent loss from aspects such as cultural atmosphere, work atmosphere, research atmosphere, interpersonal relationships, management style, and job stress. Some participants believe that the degree of cultural and value matching is a key factor to consider when talents choose to stay or leave. Participants mentioned that healthy and positive organizational culture, strong and good research atmosphere will gain recognition and satisfaction from talents and make them willing to stay. On the contrary, participants believe that inactive and unhealthy cultural atmosphere, bad and negative working atmosphere, weak and insufficient research atmosphere may lead to talent loss. In terms of interpersonal relationships, most participants talked about its impact on talents. They stated that tense relationships, poor communication, excessive workplace struggles, and internal friction can make talents feel exhausted, bored, and dissatisfied, increasing the risk of resignation. Regarding management style, participants believe that the management style of leaders has a significant impact on the turnover of high-level talents. IP2 explicitly mentioned this point. Some participants also talked about the impact of management system and methods of school on talents. Some participants mentioned the impact of job stress on talent loss, they believe that excessive job pressure may cause talents to feel exhausted and dissatisfied, and choose to leave.

Sub-theme 3: Policies and Systems

Regarding policies and systems, the respondents mainly talked about national level policies and school level systems. Among them, some respondents mentioned national policies such as the "Double High Plan", and the laws and regulations on talent mobility. Some participants believe that the "Double High Plan" has to some extent exacerbated talent turnover. In the process of building the "double high level", some vocational colleges have introduced a large number of talents in order to occupy a favorable position in the fierce talent competition, and even snatched talents from other colleges, further intensifying competition and outflow of talents. Some participants also mentioned that the laws and regulations on talent mobility are not sound, and colleges do not have specific regulations for talent mobility. Therefore, it is difficult to curb talent outflow through laws and regulations.

Almost all respondents mentioned the school systems. They mainly discussed systems and measures such as talent introduction, post-introduction guarantee, talent cultivation, promotion mechanism, salary management, professional title evaluation, incentive mechanism, assessment and evaluation, and talent loss warning. Regarding talent introduction, some respondents expressed that the talent introduction policies of many schools are unreasonable, only focusing on current needs without considering actual needs, lacking supervision during the introduction process, and lacking job introduction planning, which has a certain degree of blindness. This may lead to dissatisfaction among talents towards the school, resulting in talent turnover. Regarding the guarantee of talent introduction, some participants believe that many schools lack follow-up measures after talent introduction, which leads to dissatisfaction among talents and increases the risk of talent turnover. Some interviewees mentioned the promotion mechanism. They unanimously believe that the promotion mechanism is incomplete, rigid, and the promotion path is single, which makes talents feel frustrated and leads them to choose to leave. Some interviewees specifically discussed the impact of various systems such as introduction and training mechanisms, promotion and incentive mechanisms, management systems, and safeguard measures on talent drain. They stated that these imperfect, unreasonable, and unfair mechanisms and systems will reduce the satisfaction and work enthusiasm of talents, resulting in talent turnover.

Sub-theme 4: Salary and Benefits

More than half of the participants mentioned that salary and benefits are important factors affecting the choice of high-level talents to stay or leave. Many participants believe that the salary and benefits provided by higher vocational institutions are relatively low and unreasonable, lacking competitiveness compared to undergraduate universities, increasing the life stress of talents and lowering their sense of belonging and satisfaction, affecting

their stability.

The respondents not only expressed their views on the factors that affect brain drain, but also elaborated on the role and relationship of internal and external factors in talent drain. They believe that internal factors are the main and key factors affecting talent outflow, leading to the motivation for talent to resign. However, they didn't think that the external factors are unimportant, and they believe that external factors further drive the outflow of talents, it cannot be ignored. And, brain drain is the result of the interaction of internal and external factors, and the two are inseparable.

Limitations

This study focuses on using interview responses provided by participants to investigate question. The interview data was analyzed to identify the factors that contribute to the loss of high-level talents in higher vocational institutions. However, this study also has some shortcomings that deserve attention and improvement. The limitations are specifically reflected in the following two aspects.

Firstly, this study only selected one vocational college in Shanxi Province as a case study, lacking extensive investigation into different regions and types of vocational colleges. Due to the limited scope of the research to a certain province, the loss of high-level talents will be influenced by factors such as the economic development level, policy environment, and school operation mode of the region. Therefore, the research findings may not be applicable to vocational colleges across the country.

Secondly, the scope of interviews in this study is insufficient, as only personnel related to talent in the case school were interviewed and high-level decision-makers were not included. Therefore, it is difficult to view the situation of high-level talent loss from multiple levels and perspectives, nor can it fully and comprehensively reveal the complexity of talent loss.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the experience of conducting this study, some suggestions for further research in the future have been proposed. Firstly, it is recommended to expand the research sample and improve representativeness. Expand the sample range to cover higher vocational colleges of different regions and types, in order to enhance the generalizability of the research. Secondly, it is suggested to expand the scope of respondents and improve comprehensiveness. Add senior manager or policy makers as interviewees to enhance the depth and breadth of research. Thirdly, it is recommended to adopt a mixed research method that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to enhance the depth of the research. Simultaneously conducting interviews and conducting large-scale data collection through questionnaire surveys to enhance the objectivity of data analysis. Fourthly, it is recommended to conduct research on measures to address talent loss and evaluate their effectiveness. Research and analyze the changes in talent loss after the implementation of measures, and evaluate the effectiveness of different measures.

CONCLUSION

This study mainly focuses on the factors contributing to the turnover of high-level talents in Chinese higher vocational colleges. Through 20 interviews, we obtained the opinions of high-level talents who have already left or are willing to resign, talent managers, and talent colleagues. Through the analysis of interview data, it was found that talent attrition is influenced by both internal motivational factors (development needs, family factors, psychological factors, moral character) and external driving factors (regional gaps and external competition,

work environment, policies and systems, salary and benefits). The results of this study can provide guidance for talent management in higher vocational institutions, helping them identify the causes of talent turnover and take corresponding measures to prevent talent turnover.

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