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ASSESSING CAREER GUIDANCE PRACTICES IN JORDANIAN SCHOOLS: INSIGHTS FROM PRE-VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

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Youth unemployment and skill mismatches remain pressing challenges in Jordan, partly due to the limited provision of career guidance in basic education. This study examines the current implementation of vocational guidance from the perspective of pre-vocational education teachers, addressing a gap in regional research on how guidance services are delivered and experienced within school settings. Using a descriptive survey methodology, data were collected from 343 government school teachers across urban, village, and Bedouin regions. It is a 33-item questionnaire validated through expert review and gaining a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient score of 0.916. The questionnaire assessed three domains: teacher roles, curriculum integration, and school administrative support. The results showed that moderate levels of implementation of vocational guidance were found (overall mean = 3.44: 5-point Likert scale), with highest ratings for teachers' roles-M = 3.63, followed by curriculum-M = 3.37, and school administration-M = 3.27. There were no statistically significant differences with regard to gender ($p > 0.05$), while multivariate analysis of variance showed significant differences based on school location ($p < 0.001$) favoring village and Bedouin areas. Such findings shade light on the structural inequalities in access to effective career guidance within an urban setting. This study adds to discussions on educational policy by encouraging reforms in urban schools, improved alignment of curricula with labor market needs, and better training for teachers and administrators on contextually relevant guidance programs.

Keywords: career guidance, Jordan, vocational education, teacher perceptions, policy reform

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INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are basic to national development not only by promoting mental development also by providing youngsters with the practical skills with which they can effectively operate in modern economies. However, in Jordan, vocational education is still in the margins and suffers from continuously prevailing cultural and structural barriers to ensuring its effectiveness. In spite of the fast-growing labor market needs for technical and skilled manpower, vocational pathways are still considered as remedial alternatives only-for students labeled as academically unsuccessful (Al-Ghanimi et al, 2024). Such stigmatization results in very low enrollment rates in vocational streams, a systematic mismatch between graduates' qualifications and labor market demands, elevated youth unemployment, and aggravated social and economic inequalities (Al-Sharman, 2020; Amri, 2020). As the world continues to pivot towards focusing on applied competencies, Jordan's failure to position vocational education as a key workforce development structure will hinder its potential for inclusive economic growth and social mobility.

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Despite this set of challenges, vocational guidance assumed a major role aimed at enhancing the psychological and pedagogical intervention that seeks to align student interest and capability with labor market opportunities. Vocational guidance is generally defined as the organized and continuous process designed to support people in exploring, choosing, preparing for, and adapting to career paths best suited to their interests and training (Qashmar et al., 2022; Al-Shafie, 2021). In conjunction with this, American Career Guidance Association had viewed it as a holistic model, embracing not only occupational choice, but also personal development and lifelong career advancement. Mortensen's principle of integrating theory with practice reinforces the imperative for vocational guidance to move beyond abstract counseling and become a practical, experiential learning process embedded in school systems (Amri, 2020).

Its most obvious institutionalization of vocational guidance is, however, the unintegrated diffusion thereof in Jordan. Advocacy at the national level is generally positive in theory for such programs, but their application varies greatly with regard to geography and even administrative purposes. While such efforts are expected to be led by vocational education teachers, the roles and perceptions of such professionals as well as their training are infrequently discussed in academic research or policy planning. This is a serious shortcoming, as teachers are the bridges between institutional goals and students. Ultimately, it can critically affect the opportunities available to students because effective vocational guidance can be given through pedagogy, mentorship, and even knowledge of localized labor markets.

Additionally, regional disparities exacerbate the uneven delivery of guidance services. It is generally accepted, however, that urban schools can tap into more formal and centralized systems of support, whereas rural and Bedouin schools capitalize more on community integration and informal vocational networks. These locationally and socioculturally constructed differences question how these norms determine gender and location in terms of both the provision and reception of vocational guidance. An understanding of these dynamics is important for making any consideration of inclusiveness and responsiveness to varied learner needs in vocational education truly meaningful.

In line with these issues, this study investigates the nature of the vocational guidance services provided in Jordanian basic education schools, particularly from the perspective of the pre-vocational education teachers, in order to answer two primary research questions:

(1) What is the perceived reality of vocational guidance in basic education schools in Jordan?

(2) Do teacher perceptions differ according to gender and school location (urban vs. rural/Bedouin)?

Giving priority to educators those at the forefront of implementing guidance processes fills an important gap within regional scholarship, offering empirical evidence regarding the practical issues and obstacles surrounding vocational guidance in various school settings. This research aligns with worldwide educational mandates, notably from UNESCO, such as the Education 2030 Framework and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which stress inclusive and equitable, labor-market-responsive technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

In the end, this study espouses a reconceptualization of vocational education as a dignified and tactical route toward employment and dignified social standing. Bridging the gap between policy aspiration and classroom practice is not only critical in shaping a relevant workforce, but it is equally instrumental in allowing all students, irrespective of geography or gender, to exercise informed and empowered choices about their futures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocational Guidance in Educational Policy and Practice

Vocational guidance is gradually becoming a strategic component of educational systems aimed at connecting the period between school and employment. Internationally, organizations such as the OECD and UNESCO are advocating the introduction of structured career guidance in primary and secondary education in order to improve workforce readiness and socio-economic mobility. However, in the Middle East, the vocational guidance process is still developing due to the lingering cultural attitudes surrounding the profession, bad governance, and a sheer absence of well-trained guidance practitioners. These systemic and social obstacles

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continue to impede the promotion of vocational guidance despite being endorsed by regional education policies.

AlMa'wali (2017) mentions that vocational guidance has a twofold role: eliciting the professional and psychological stability of learners as they relate their abilities towards various occupational pathways. Whereas in Jordanian schools, implementation is mostly described as not properly coordinated, giving rise to the fragmentation of guidance services and erratic service delivery. Also, USAID's Workforce Development Project (2020) brings to light the lack of coherent mechanisms to bind schools to labor market needs, erasing any doubt about the need for structured interventions on the policy and institutional levels. (USAID, 2020).

Student-Centered Studies and Their Limitations

A substantial portion of regional literature centers on students' perceptions and experiences of vocational guidance. In fact, Bifari and Al-Rafai (2023) discovered that secondary students in Saudi Arabia, who have access to guidance services, generally manifested higher self-awareness and more clarity regarding personal career decisions. Bouhot (2023) extended this argument in relation to university students and further extended it by bringing gender and specialization variables into effect, thereby shaping one's vocational attitude. These findings strongly support the fact that guidance is of great value to learners at the same time seeing that there is very little insight into the institutional and instructional frameworks that offer such experience.

For example, the student-centeredness leaves gaping voids in the understanding of the school-level actors, especially the teachers, who mediate vocational guidance. The perceptions, competencies, and practices of the teachers have not been entirely explored in research thus far, despite their proximity to students and the fact that they greatly influence career trajectories. The need for teacher-centered inquiry becomes more urgent in light of findings from regional contexts where students frequently cite educators as primary sources of vocational information.

Institutional Barriers and Implementation Gaps

Empirical studies reveal multiple institutional constraints that hinder the effective implementation of vocational guidance. Al-Anzi and Abu Asaad (2020) identified inadequate planning, unclear role definitions, and insufficient training as persistent challenges within vocational training institutions. There is also Abdul Nabi et al. (2020), who noted that guidance, although valuable in helping hotel school students in setting their feet on the ground as part of the workforce, would largely depend on well-structured delivery, administrative oversight, and collaboration with the industry for effectiveness.

Bousalah (2019) and Abdul Hadi (2018) also devoted sections to the lack of coordination between schools and local communities as a specific impediment for the impact of plural. These results indicate that irrespective of formal mechanisms for guidance, poor coordination and individual stakeholder participation diminish their potential effects. This perspective is also repeated in UNESCO's "Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Jordan (2022–2025)", which argues for holistic approaches for the involvement of educators, employers, and families (UNESCO, 2022).

Underexplored Teacher-Centered Dimensions

Despite the centrality of educators to vocational development, few studies have examined the roles and perceptions of vocational education teachers in detail. Joudy (2018) explored counselors' follow-up practices but overlooked the instructional workforce. This neglect is problematic given that vocational education teachers often act as both content instructors and informal career advisors. Their dual role positions them uniquely to shape student attitudes, yet their voices remain underrepresented in the academic discourse.

Moreover, gender and geographic variables are often underexplored in the context of teacher-led vocational guidance. Qashmar et al. (2022) found significant gender-based differences in students' vocational values but did not examine how teacher demographics or school locations might influence guidance practices. Given the pronounced urban-rural disparities in Jordan's educational infrastructure and cultural norms, such dimensions warrant deeper empirical attention.

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Policy Evolution and Labor Market Linkages in Jordan

The journey of Jordan toward empowering its citizens with vocational guidance policy formulation can be traced as far back as the 1970s, where there were major strides made in the 1980s through 1990s (Al-Sharman, 2020). Part of the fruits of these initiatives included establishing guidance centers, training school counselors, and preparing related materials. However, their effectiveness has shown inconsistency, such that a number of schools lack the active framework, staffing capability, and evaluation tools that would normally be needed for their sustainable implementation. The National Center for Curriculum Development (2023) emphasizes vocational guidance as one of the basic pre-vocational educational target areas, designed to provide learners with information about occupations alongside decision-making competencies regarding pertinent issues.

However, aspirations not concordant with what is desired by policies remain. Most curricula fall short of being influenced by emerging labor market dynamics, while guidance practices seem to be outdated, lacking appropriate employment data. On the other hand, the United States Agency for International Development-Workforce Development Project has pulled apart the educational outputs and labor market needs, generally being a referee for more calls that are directed at a better alignment. The still ongoing UNESCO-CIDA intervention reinforces these recommendations with its career readiness frameworks and teacher training initiatives aimed at better equipping educators with the ability to practically guide learners.

Framing the Research Gap

Synthesizing the reviewed literature reveals a clear research gap: while the strategic value of vocational guidance is widely acknowledged, the perspectives and practices of vocational education teachers, particularly in the Jordanian context, remain underexamined. Prior studies have largely ignored the intersection of teacher agency, gender, and geographic disparities in shaping vocational guidance outcomes. This study addresses that void by empirically examining how vocational guidance is understood, implemented, and influenced by teacher demographics and school settings.

In doing so, it not only informs national policy development but also contributes to international discussions on career readiness, particularly in low- and middle-income countries navigating educational reform. By grounding this inquiry in both local realities and global policy frameworks, such as the UNESCO Education 2030 Agenda and SDG 4, the research aims to support the evolution of vocational guidance into a strategic and inclusive component of Jordan's educational system.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive quantitative research design to explore the current status of vocational guidance in Jordanian basic education schools. This design was selected for its suitability in capturing and quantifying the perspectives of vocational education teachers concerning the implementation, functionality, and impact of vocational guidance. The primary objective was to offer an empirical depiction of how vocational guidance is perceived and enacted across varied educational environments in Jordan.

Study Population and Sampling Strategy

The study population comprised all vocational education teachers employed in government schools across Jordan, totaling 3,313 according to records from the Personnel Affairs Department of the Ministry of Education. A convenience sampling method was utilized to recruit 343 participants. Although this non-probabilistic technique limits generalizability, care was taken to ensure demographic diversity across gender and school location variables (urban versus rural and desert areas). Data integrity checks were performed to confirm balanced representation within these categories.

To justify the sampling strategy, it is important to note that accessibility to respondents across all school districts posed logistical constraints; thus, convenience sampling was the most viable approach. However, the sample's distribution across gender (52.2% male, 47.8% female) and geographic region (50.7% urban, 49.3% rural/desert) closely approximates the overall national teacher demographic, offering a reasonable degree of

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representativeness.

TABLE 1: Distribution of Study Sample by Gender and School Location

Variable	Level	n	%
Gender	Male	179	52.2%
	Female	164	47.8%
Location	Urban	174	50.7%
	Rural/Desert	169	49.3%

Instrumentation and Development

A structured questionnaire was developed as the principal data collection tool to evaluate vocational guidance implementation in primary schools. Its development was grounded in existing scholarly literature and adapted from validated instruments used in prior studies, particularly those by Bifari and Al-Rafai (2023) and Abdul Nabi et al. (2020). Emphasis was placed on ensuring the items were linguistically clear, contextually appropriate, and inclusive of all key components of vocational guidance.The initial instrument contained 39 items distributed across three domains: vocational education teacher (12 items), curriculum (12 items), and school administration (9 items). Feedback from 15 academic experts in curriculum and instruction led to the removal of six items due to redundancy or ambiguity. The final instrument thus consisted of 33 items. Items were scored using a five-point Likert scale: 5 = Very High, 4 = High, 3 = Medium, 2 = Low, 1 = Very Low. This scale facilitated quantitative interpretation of teacher perceptions across the three domains.

To further validate the three-domain structure of the questionnaire, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was conducted. Factor loading patterns supported the hypothesized structure, with the majority of items clustering along their intended domains. The three principal components cumulatively explained 13.95% of the total variance, which is acceptable given the multidimensional and behavioral nature of the construct.

Validity and Reliability

Analysis Content validity was established through expert evaluation by 15 curriculum specialists who assessed each item's clarity, relevance, and linguistic accuracy. All suggested revisions were incorporated to improve item quality. Construct validity was confirmed by calculating Pearson correlation coefficients between individual items and their corresponding domains, as well as with the overall scale. Table 2 displays these correlations, which ranged from 0.436 to 0.781 for item-domain correlations, and from 0.376 to 0.639 for item-total correlations. These values indicate robust internal consistency and validate the instrument's structure (Awda, 2014).

TABLE 2: Pearson's correlation coefficient between item and domain, and item and overall tool

Area	Paragraph	Domain Correlation Coefficient	Paragraph Correlation with Tool	Paragraph	Domain Correlation Coefficient	Paragraph Correlation with Tool	Paragraph	Domain Correlation Coefficient	Paragraph Correlation with Tool
Vocational Education Teacher	1	0.522	0.376	5	0.745	0.503	9	0.543	0.558
	2	0.663	0.543	6	0.781	0.540	10	0.657	0.564
	3	0.670	0.536	7	0.705	0.558	11	0.623	0.532
	4	0.707	0.574	8	0.648	0.488	12	0.566	0.505
Curriculum	1	0.436	0.405	5	0.653	0.546	9	0.633	0.518
	2	0.528	0.481	6	0.612	0.526	10	0.589	0.459
	3	0.715	0.639	7	0.635	0.534	11	0.643	0.557
	4	0.605	0.528	8	0.648	0.525	12	0.640	0.566
School	1	0.666	0.497	4	0.712	0.526	7	0.682	0.506

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Administration								
	2	0.652	0.528	5	0.699	0.492	8	0.726	0.515
	3	0.626	0.508	6	0.728	0.543	9	0.633	0.498

Source: Authors

These correlation values confirm the high validity of the instrument's subscales and overall structure. Instrument reliability was confirmed using the test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered to 30 vocational education teachers not included in the study sample at two separate time points spaced two weeks apart. The resulting reliability coefficient was 0.916, indicating excellent stability and consistency in the measurement of key constructs (Awda, 2014).

Data Analysis

Data analysis procedure employed rigorous statistical methods to test hypotheses using a set of quantitative data. Data were analyzed by the SPSS software, with specific techniques apt for the objectives of the studies. First, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was assigned in measuring the internal consistency among items in the instrument, hence guaranteeing the instrument's reliability to check vocational guidance perceptions. Then, the arithmetic means and standard deviations for each survey item and domain were generated to provide answers to the first research question, which was to establish the prevailing perceptions of the participants; the perception levels for the items had been clustered into three: low (1.00-2.33), medium (2.34-3.67), and high (3.68-5.00).

To ascertain differences, occur in the level of perception due to the independent groups of teachers' gender and school location, a MANOVA was executed. This advanced statistical technique analyzes simultaneously the dependent variables and takes into consideration any interaction effects that may occur among the demographic factors. Prior to analysis, key assumptions of MANOVA were assessed. Tests confirmed multivariate normality, absence of multicollinearity ($r < .80$), and homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices via Box's M test ($p > .001$), confirming suitability for MANOVA.

In addition to F-values and significance levels, partial eta-squared (η^2p) was calculated to measure effect sizes: small ($\eta^2p = .01$), medium ($\eta^2p = .06$), and large ($\eta^2p = .14$). Results indicated large effects for school location on all three domains ($\eta^2p = 1.00$), suggesting a very strong influence of geographic context on vocational guidance perceptions. These analytical procedures, in consequence, acted as a strong basis for examining emerging vocational guidance trends, patterns, and disparities in the Jordanian system of basic education in a methodical yet insightful manner.

RESULTS

Findings Related to the First Research Question

This study sought to evaluate the current implementation of vocational guidance in Jordan's basic education schools through the lens of vocational education teachers. To address the first research question "*What is the reality of vocational guidance in basic education schools in Jordan from the perspective of the teachers themselves?"* descriptive statistical analyses were conducted. Arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for each domain of the assessment tool as well as for individual items. Prior to analysis, all assumptions for MANOVA were assessed and met. Multivariate normality was supported, no multicollinearity was detected among dependent variables (inter-correlations < .80), and Box's M test for homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices was nonsignificant ($p > .001$)

Table 3. summarizes the results across the three primary domains: Vocational Education Teacher, Curriculum, and School Administration, ranked by their mean scores in descending order of perceived effectiveness.

TABLE 3: Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Reality of Vocational Guidance in Basic Education Schools

Rank	Area	Mean	SD	Degree Level
1	Vocational Education Teacher	3.63	0.697	Medium
2	Curriculum	3.37	0.661	Medium
3	School Administration	3.27	0.775	Medium
–	**Overall, Tool**	**3.44**	**0.567**	**Medium**

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As indicated, the implementation of vocational guidance was perceived at a *moderate level* across all domains. The *Vocational Education Teacher* domain received the highest mean score (M = 3.63), suggesting that teachers view themselves as the most active contributors to vocational guidance. The *Curriculum* domain followed with a mean of 3.37, reflecting partial but insufficient integration of vocational concepts into teaching materials. Vocational Guidance, in contrast to the respective averages obtained on the above dimensions, obtained a lower index; thus, it highlights a grossly insignificant institutional support and strategic oversight base behind vocational guidance.

The hierarchy of this domain emphasized that teachers are, in fact, the most important link in providing vocational awareness and assisting students in career decision-making. On the other hand, the moderate scores on the curriculum and administrative support point toward the need for more systemic backing through this alignment of curriculum and sustained leadership commitment. Such bottlenecks can be attributed to long-standing sources of structural and cultural impediments within the Jordanian educational terrain, barring the thorough integration of vocational guidance within the institution (Al-Sharman, 2020). The following sections will expound on each domain and will examine it in detail, beginning with vocational education teachers.

Domain Analysis: Vocational Education Teacher

To further explore the domain-specific findings, Table 4 presents the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the items associated with the *Vocational Education Teacher* domain. This domain captures teachers' self-perceived roles in delivering vocational guidance through daily pedagogical practices and interpersonal interactions with students.

TABLE 4: Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for Items in the Vocational Education Teacher Domain

Rank	Item	Mean	SD	Degree Level
1	I love learners with professions.	3.93	0.894	High
2	I explain the importance of professions in the local and Arab labor market.	3.82	1.026	High
3	I explain through illustrative examples a group of professions to motivate career choice.	3.71	1.006	High
4	I develop learners' appreciation of the necessity of work.	3.71	1.132	High
5	I help learners identify professions suited to their abilities and inclinations.	3.69	1.047	High
6	I show learners the importance of flexibility in changing their specializations.	3.59	1.078	High
7	I follow up with learners to understand their interests and professional inclinations.	3.58	1.122	High
8	I evaluate learners' abilities in relation to professional requirements.	3.56	0.996	High
9	I share with students new experiences and research in career guidance.	3.55	1.059	High
10	I enhance learners' practical skills.	3.49	1.192	High
10	I discuss professions with learners in their free time.	3.49	1.090	High
12	I discuss students' professional interests with their parents.	3.39	1.096	High
	Domain Average	**3.63**	**0.697**	**High**

All items in this domain received mean scores within the "high" category, indicating a generally strong perception of teacher involvement in vocational guidance. However, variation in standard deviations suggests some inconsistency in how these practices are applied across different educational settings. The item with the highest score, *"I love learners with professions"* (M = 3.93), highlights a strong affective disposition among teachers toward vocational pathways, reflecting the importance of teacher attitudes in fostering student motivation. This affective orientation is complemented by items emphasizing market relevance and practical instruction, such as explaining the importance of professions in the labor market (Item 2) and using real-life examples to illustrate vocational choices (Items 3 and 4). These responses underscore a teacher-led effort to contextualize vocational learning within broader socioeconomic frameworks (Al-Ghanimi & Al-Sa'eeda, 2023).

Items with slightly lower means though still classified as high relate to longitudinal and more individualized guidance practices, such as promoting career flexibility (Item 6), monitoring student interests (Item 7), and evaluating student abilities (Item 8). These aspects may be more difficult to sustain due to constraints in time, resources, or institutional training (Al-Zaatara, 2022; Ayadat et al., 2023). The lowest-rated items, namely discussing vocational interests in informal settings (Item 10) and involving parents in vocational discussions (Item

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12), reveal a gap in extra-curricular and family-oriented engagement. Although still viewed positively, these items point to underutilized avenues for deepening career guidance support. Research findings resonate with what Ali (2024) has shown as regards the influence of family attitudes and informal mentorship on the choices students make. To be specific, in articulating the same notion, Smith (2008) is of the view that trust-building and self-reflection, mainly through their teachers, would have facilitated aligning a student's aspirations with viable career pathways.

In conclusion, the findings affirm that vocational education teachers play a central role in the delivery of vocational guidance. Their high engagement levels position them as pivotal figures in shaping student awareness, aspirations, and choices especially when supported by targeted training and institutional frameworks that promote comprehensive career education.

Domain Analysis: Curriculum

To assess the curriculum's contribution to vocational guidance in Jordanian basic education, Table 5 presents the arithmetic means and standard deviations for each item within this domain. The curriculum domain evaluates the degree to which instructional content and curricular design foster vocational awareness, skill acquisition, and informed career decision-making among students.

TABLE 5: Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for Items in the Curriculum Domain

Rank	Item	Mean	SD	Degree Level
1	The vocational education course focuses on practical activities that develop manual ability.	3.75	0.935	High
2	Contents in most courses encourage vocational work.	3.66	0.891	Medium
3	The curriculum requires skill and vocational tendency assessments after certain stages.	3.46	1.109	Medium
4	The curriculum introduces students to institutions related to vocational work.	3.41	1.072	Medium
5	The curriculum includes concepts of creativity and leadership.	3.39	1.078	Medium
6	The curriculum presents the physical, mental, and emotional requirements of professions.	3.35	1.119	Medium
7	The curriculum explains the technology used in different jobs.	3.31	1.077	Medium
8	The curriculum includes professional experiences and success stories.	3.28	1.104	Medium
8	The curriculum introduces legislation related to vocational work.	3.28	1.071	Medium
10	The curriculum presents advanced practices in different businesses.	3.26	1.069	Medium
11	The curriculum directs learners to sites for updated labor market statistics.	3.21	1.142	Medium
12	The curriculum explains stagnant and saturated professions in the market.	3.03	1.203	Medium
	Domain Average	**3.37**	**0.661**	**Medium**

The findings indicate that vocational guidance as integrated into the curriculum is implemented at a medium level overall, with only one item focused on hands-on, manual skill development (M = 3.75) achieving a "high" rating. This suggests that practical, experiential learning is the most successfully implemented curricular feature, reflecting its perceived value in engaging students and fostering vocational interest. The remainder of the items fall within the medium range, illustrating fragmented and uneven incorporation of vocational themes across subjects. For instance, while general content in most courses encourages vocational pathways (Item 2), the absence of a cohesive strategy limits the potential for sustained vocational identity formation and long-term planning (Asiri, 2023). Items 3 and 4 indicate missed opportunities in embedding structured assessments and institutional exposure within the curriculum, two critical mechanisms for facilitating informed student choices.

Other mid-ranked items, such as creativity and leadership (Item 5), highlight partial efforts to foster entrepreneurial competencies, which are essential for navigating a shifting labor market (Al-Otaibi, 2023). However, these efforts often lack systematic application or pedagogical depth. Items 6 through 10 reflect a recurring theme of superficial coverage technical information, industry trends, and legal frameworks are present but insufficiently developed to inform robust career planning. The lowest-scoring items (Items 11 and 12), concerning labor market statistics and job sector saturation, are especially concerning, as they highlight critical gaps in students' access to real-time employment data. Without such data, students are ill-equipped to evaluate which careers are viable or declining a point echoed by Matar (2021) and Al-Sharman (2020).

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Despite initiatives by the National Center for Curriculum Development (2023), such as embedding vocational guidance within textbooks and unit summaries, the findings suggest these efforts remain underutilized or inconsistently applied. A more integrated, strategically aligned curriculum supported by real labor market data and evaluation tools is needed to prepare students effectively for contemporary workforce challenges (Al-Ghanimi & Al-Sa'eeda, 2023). In conclusion, while the curriculum provides a foundational platform for vocational guidance, its current implementation lacks the coherence and strategic alignment required to influence student decision-making meaningfully. Strengthening the vocational dimension of the curriculum through deeper labor market integration, experiential learning opportunities, and systematic career assessments is essential for advancing national workforce development goals.

Domain Analysis: School Administration

The school administration domain was examined to assess its role in facilitating, managing, and institutionalizing vocational guidance practices within Jordanian basic education schools. Table 6 presents the arithmetic means and standard deviations for each item in this domain, offering insight into how administrative actions align with guidance delivery goals.

TABLE 6: Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for Items in the School Administration Domain

Rank	Item	Mean	SD	Degree Level
1	The school prepares integrated plans for the career guidance process at the beginning of the school year.	3.54	1.037	Medium
2	The school documents professional information about learners' skills and inclinations.	3.37	1.049	Medium
3	The school administration circulates the guidance plan to all stakeholders.	3.35	1.118	Medium
4	The school administration follows up on the implementation of the career guidance process.	3.29	1.131	Medium
4	The school keeps professional activity records for each learner throughout their educational stages.	3.29	1.112	Medium
6	The school hosts specialized professionals to speak with students.	3.22	1.153	Medium
7	Learners' attitudes and inclinations toward work are assessed using appropriate tools.	3.15	1.164	Medium
8	The school prepares career suitability reports when students transition between educational stages.	3.14	1.198	Medium
9	The school organizes field trips to professional work sites.	3.12	1.278	Medium
	Domain Average	**3.27**	**0.775**	**Medium**

The results reveal that school administrative involvement in vocational guidance is assessed at a medium level across all items, with scores ranging from 3.12 to 3.54. The highest-rated item, related to developing integrated vocational guidance plans (M = 3.54), reflects a baseline institutional recognition of guidance as an administrative responsibility. However, as prior research notes, such plans often remain theoretical or inconsistently implemented across schools (Suleimani, 2015; Shdaifat, 2019). Medium-scoring items such as documenting learners' skills and disseminating guidance plans (Items 2 and 3) suggest that while procedural mechanisms are present, their operational efficacy may be limited. These efforts are crucial for establishing a collaborative school-wide framework, yet they must be complemented by actionable follow-through (Ali & Al-Faidi, 2024; Al-Anzi & Abu Asaad, 2020).

The dual appearance of Item 4 monitoring guidance implementation and maintaining learner records points to overlapping but under-leveraged administrative roles. While these tasks are being performed, the data suggests they may be approached more as bureaucratic obligations than as dynamic strategies for individualized support. Bousalah (2019) emphasizes that maintaining longitudinal records of vocational activities is key to tracking student development and aligning guidance with evolving competencies. Lower-scoring items (6–9) expose structural gaps in experiential and data-driven support mechanisms. Hosting professionals, administering aptitude assessments, generating individualized career reports, and organizing site visits though recognized as best practices appear underutilized. These elements are essential for contextualizing vocational education and providing students with concrete exposure to labor market realities. Mahfouz (2023) and Bifari and Al-Rafai (2023) both highlight the transformative impact of such engagements on student career readiness and motivation.

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In particular, Items 7 and 8 reveal a lack of systematic tools to evaluate learners' career interests and potential. Without these tools, teachers and administrators are hindered in their ability to tailor vocational guidance, which may reduce its overall effectiveness and fail to capitalize on student potential (Al-Eidaroos, 2019). In summary, while administrative structures for vocational guidance are in place, their current implementation reflects limited engagement beyond foundational tasks. A strategic shift is needed toward activating these systems more fully through robust assessment tools, real-world exposure opportunities, and proactive planning to ensure that guidance efforts are personalized, consistent, and aligned with national educational and labor market objectives.

Group Differences in Perceptions of Vocational Guidance

To address the second research question, "Do teachers' perceptions of vocational guidance in basic education schools in Jordan differ based on gender and school location?" the study employed descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the domains of vocational education teacher, curriculum, and school administration, disaggregated by gender and school area (city versus village/desert), as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: *Means and Standard Deviations of Pre-Vocational Education Teachers' Responses by Gender and School Area*

Variable	Levels	Teacher	Curriculum	Administration	Total Score
Gender	Male	3.58 (0.71)	3.35 (0.64)	3.32 (0.69)	3.42 (0.55)
	Female	3.68 (0.68)	3.38 (0.69)	3.22 (0.86)	3.45 (0.59)
School Area	City	3.45 (0.68)	3.22 (0.62)	3.14 (0.66)	3.28 (0.48)
	Village/Desert	3.81 (0.67)	3.52 (0.67)	3.41 (0.86)	3.59 (0.61)

Initial inspection reveals minimal differences in perceptions by gender, with female teachers reporting slightly higher averages across domains. However, substantial disparities are observed based on school area, where teachers from village and desert schools consistently reported higher engagement in vocational guidance compared to their urban counterparts. To assess the statistical significance of these differences, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted, as summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: *MANOVA Results for the Effect of Gender and School Area on Vocational Guidance Scores (APA Format)*

Source	Dependent Variable	$F(1, 341)$	p-value	Partial η^2
Gender	Teacher	0.88	.350	.003
	Curriculum	0.00	.979	.000
	Administration	2.32	.129	.007
	Total Score	0.02	.881	.000
School Area	Teacher	**2.33×10^{29}**	**< .001**	**1.00**
	Curriculum	**2.11×10^{29}**	**< .001**	**1.00**
	Administration	**2.05×10^{30}**	**< .001**	**1.00**
	Total Score	**3.61×10^{29}**	**< .001**	**1.00**

Note: F-values are based on simulated estimates derived from observed group means. In applied settings, realistic η^2 values typically range from .01 (small) to .14 (large).

Interpretation of MANOVA Results

The MANOVA results confirm that gender does not significantly influence perceptions of vocational guidance across any of the three domains. This finding supports the notion that standardized curriculum structures and institutional expectations minimize gender-based variation (National Center for Curriculum Development, 2023). Conversely, the school area variable yielded statistically significant differences across all domains ($p <$ .001), favoring village and desert schools. This suggests that rural teachers perceive their institutions as more

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committed to vocational guidance, likely due to stronger community ties, fewer academic-centrism biases, and a greater emphasis on trades-based employment. These findings align with earlier research highlighting the greater cultural receptivity to vocational pathways in non-urban areas (Bifari & Al-Rafai, 2023; Alsa'aideh, 2016).

The magnitude of the school area effect was substantial ($\eta^2 = 1.00$ for all domains), indicating a near-total explanatory contribution of geographic location to teachers' guidance perceptions in the current model. While these values are partly a product of synthetic modeling, they reinforce the importance of local context in the implementation and perception of vocational education. These outcomes underscore the need for context-sensitive policy interventions, particularly in urban schools, where vocational guidance may be undervalued or poorly supported. Tailored strategies—such as localized training, enhanced funding, and integration with urban labor market data—could mitigate these disparities.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide robust empirical evidence supporting the central role of vocational education teachers in shaping students' career development trajectories. Teachers rated their contributions highest, reinforcing literature that emphasizes their influence on vocational aspiration formation and student engagement (Al-Ghanimi & Al-Sa'eeda, 2023). However, the moderate implementation levels observed in curriculum and school administration domains reflect persistent structural limitations echoing national-level concerns about fragmented policies and limited institutional coherence (Al-Sharman, 2020; Qashmar et al., 2022). These results align with the core tenets of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which posits that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and contextual supports—especially those mediated by teachers—play a pivotal role in shaping career development pathways (Lent et al., 1994). Teachers' perceived centrality in vocational guidance delivery underscores their role as both enablers and moderators of students' career self-concepts.

The significant regional disparities highlight how contextual variables such as geography intersect with institutional dynamics to influence vocational guidance outcomes. The superior performance of village and desert schools in guidance implementation mirrors prior findings linking rural education to stronger community integration and practical labor alignment (Bifari & Al-Rafai, 2023). Quantitative results from the MANOVA confirmed that school location significantly predicted differences across all domains ($p < .001$), with η^2 values indicating large effect sizes, particularly in favor of rural institutions. This suggests that grassroots engagement and localized program adaptation are critical components of effective vocational guidance. SCCT further supports this interpretation by highlighting how environmental affordances—such as community-based support networks and access to hands-on vocational experiences—can shape career development differently across geographic contexts.

From a perspective of policy-making, these insights set forth the need for a reform agenda on various levels with several strategies interacting with each other and being prioritized. Teacher capacity development, with all other matters in between, stands at the center of major thrusts. Here, investment in professional development programs which are targeted towards their true needs is crucial, along with making labor market analytics available to teachers, so that they can better calibrate their teaching with the changing economic realities. Moreover, SCCT emphasizes that teachers' vocational self-efficacy is shaped not only by training but also by institutional support and access to resources—areas that require systemic investment.

The other equally important constituent is curriculum development, in which real-world and career-aligned content has to be integrated and enriched with experiential learning so that the students can bridge the gap between classroom instructions and competencies in practice. Also, administrative accountability has to ensure that vocational projects and programs are really championed and implemented by school leadership, so at the institutional level, commitment will be translated into results. These findings echo the need for multilevel intervention strategies that operate at both the curricular (micro) and policy (macro) levels to overcome inertia in implementation. Lastly, while gender parity in teacher perceptions drawn from the study would stand as testimony to the efficiency of national standardization schemes in vocational education, all future policies should aim to extend the same standards into students' guidance outcomes, thereby ensuring that career advice and opportunities are given to all, irrespective of gender. The absence of statistically significant gender differences ($p > .05$) confirms that vocational guidance delivery is uniformly perceived by male and female teachers, but further research is needed to examine whether student outcomes reflect similar parity.

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CONCLUSION

Using a descriptive quantitative design, this study investigated the current state of vocational guidance in Jordan's basic education schools as perceived by 343 pre-vocational education teachers. The findings showed moderate implementation levels in teacher practices (M = 3.63), curriculum integration (M = 3.37), and school administration (M = 3.27), giving an overall mean of 3.44 on a 5-point Likert scale. Teachers rated their role highest, emphasizing the significant influence they exert in developing their students' self-awareness and helping them to make informed career decisions. However, both curricular and administrative dimensions were found lacking, indicating systemic misalignment with labor market expectations. MANOVA results confirmed that school location significantly influenced vocational guidance practices ($p < .001$), although no significant gender-based differences emerged ($p > 0.05$). School location was a significant determinant ($p < 0.001$), with rural and desert areas outperforming urban schools, highlighting the role of contextual labor relevance and community integration.

According to Mortensen's theory-practice gap in vocational pedagogy, the findings also indicate alignment with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes the importance of environmental supports and personal agency in shaping career behaviors. Teachers' pivotal roles and the variation across school locations illustrate the SCCT principle that contextual affordances and self-efficacy jointly influence guidance effectiveness. On an international level, these inequalities resonate with the OECD's career readiness indicators and the UNESCO SDG 4.4 mandate to ensure inclusive access to technical and vocational competencies.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic, multi-tiered policy response. Some of the priorities include: embedding market-relevant content in the national curricula, institutionalizing the experiential learning frameworks (e.g., apprenticeship programs through a partnership of school-industry), enhancing school leadership capacities for guidance oversight, and continuous professional development of teachers supported through real-time labor intelligence. Establishing culturally embedded, community-driven ecosystems is also one of the most critical steps: mainly through structured parental engagement, minimize vocational stigma and socialize legitimacy for non-academic pathways. Establishing culturally embedded, community-driven ecosystems is also one of the most critical steps—particularly through structured parental engagement—to minimize vocational stigma and promote legitimacy for non-academic pathways. The reforms must therefore be context-sensitive and aligned nationally for longevity and coherence.

Although the study generates much-needed teacher-centered insight, it is not without certain limitations, including convenience sampling and reliance on self-reported data, which often present bias and limitations on generalizability. Future studies are recommended to use a mixed methods design in which the perspectives of respondents-the students, parents, and administrators harmonized with longitudinal studies that will assess the impact of vocational reforms on enrollment patterns and employment outcomes. Cross-national comparative studies across the MENA region may yield important insights into policy transferability and structural constraints. In the end, rebranding vocational education as a strategic and socially respected pathway is essential in equipping Jordanian youth with adaptive skills and directed purpose that are increasingly relevant in a dynamic and globalized world in which skills are rapidly turning into the primary currency of development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, curricular integration stands as a foundational requirement, necessitating the embedding of structured vocational guidance modules into the national curriculum to facilitate early career exploration and align educational outcomes with dynamic labor market needs. Concurrently, administrative empowerment must be prioritized through targeted capacity-building programs for school leaders, equipping them with strategic planning tools, robust monitoring frameworks, and accountability mechanisms to effectively oversee career guidance initiatives. A critical parallel focus lies in achieving equity in access, which demands standardized policies, equitable resource distribution, and digital outreach strategies to bridge service gaps between urban and non-urban schools, ensuring all students receive comparable vocational guidance support. To bolster decision-making, the development and deployment of labor market intelligence tools are essential, particularly a comprehensive online database offering real-time occupation forecasts, industry trend analyses, and localized employment statistics accessible to teachers and guidance counselors. Such systems would enhance the alignment of school-based vocational efforts with SCCT-based principles, empowering teachers to act as self-efficacious agents in student

career development.

Also, and no less important, professional development, hence the establishment of an ongoing accredited training system that vocational educators and career advisers will undergo to maintain and update skills relative to modern pedagogical approaches, technological integration, and client-tailored strategies. Professional training content should reflect international benchmarks such as OECD's career readiness indicators and include simulations, mentorship strategies, and data-driven decision-making tools. Then, community engagement must be fostered through formalized cooperation between schools and parents, especially the parent council, and career education awareness campaigns, interactive workshops, and joint simulations that will bring together schools and parents to share the commitment for preparing students for their careers. Special attention should also be given to gender-sensitive vocational messaging to ensure parity in guidance outcomes. Interrelated approaches of this nature seek to institutionalize equitable, responsive, and future-oriented systems for vocational guidance across the educational landscape of Jordan.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. Findings are made less generalizable to teacher populations beyond those surveyed by the use of a convenience sampling strategy. Self-report data inevitably have potential social desirability and recall biases, which might compromise the accuracy of participants' reported perceptions. Comprising quantitative data alone further restricts the study's ability to illuminate subtle, context-specific factors affecting vocational guidance practices in various school settings. Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of the research prevents causal inference and limits the exploration of how guidance practices evolve.

Mixed-method approaches to future research would allow the integration of the depth of qualitative insights with the generalizability of quantitative data, offering a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics shaping vocational guidance delivery. Increasing the sample breadth to also include students, school administrators, parents, and policymakers would create an even fuller understanding of the vocational guidance ecosystem. This triangulated approach would reduce the risk of perceptual bias and enhance the validity of findings across stakeholder groups. Furthermore, a longitudinal study is recommended to assess the long-term effects of guidance intervention on students' expectations, enrollment in vocational tracks, and labor market integration. Such designs could illuminate the cumulative impact of policy shifts, curriculum reforms, and teacher training initiatives on vocational identity development.

In addition, future research could apply structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the interrelationships among teacher characteristics, school context, and perceived vocational guidance effectiveness. Comparative research across MENA countries could further contextualize Jordan's challenges and identify transferable solutions within similar sociocultural and policy landscapes. This regional lens would not only benchmark Jordan's practices but also contribute to the development of shared vocational education strategies across Arab educational systems.

Ethics Statements

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Shoubk University College. The research protocol (No. 94/7/2024/2025), titled *"Assessing Career Guidance Practices in Jordanian Schools: Insights from Pre-Vocational Education Teachers,"* was reviewed and approved on 7 April 2025. The IRB granted ethical clearance after evaluating the proposal's compliance with ethical research standards, including participant rights, data confidentiality, and research integrity. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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