

The Dilemma and Suggestions of Family Education under the Coordinated Development of General Education and Vocational Education in China

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Abstract: Family education is the starting point and cornerstone of lifelong education. Parents or guardians serve as a child's first teachers and play a crucial role in their subsequent development. Over the years, both vocational education and general education in China have undergone development and innovation, transitioning from a divisive approach to the current coordinated development, with continuous efforts to elevate the status of vocational education. However, family education, which serves as the foundation of individual education, faces challenges such as outdated beliefs, lack of skills, and insufficient social support. In order to promote the coordinated development of both forms of education and the comprehensive growth of children, this article attempts to address the practical issues related to family education in general and vocational education and proposes suggestions for advancement.

Keywords: coordinated development of education, family education, recommendations

1. Introduction

The coordinated development of general education and vocational education is a new concept introduced in the newly revised "People's Republic of China Vocational Education Law," specifically in Chapter 2, Article 14, which states: "The state shall optimize the education structure, scientifically allocate education resources, and coordinate and promote the coordinated development of vocational education and general education at different stages after compulsory education according to local conditions^[1]." It is also mentioned in the 20th National Congress report, which emphasizes the need to coordinate vocational education, higher education, and continuing education, promote integration between general and vocational education, industry and education integration, and enhance the role of science and education in national development, thereby optimizing the positioning of vocational education types.

The family is the first place where individuals receive education, and starting from the source of individual education can help the next generation develop the right educational values. Therefore, families need to actively participate in the trend of coordinated development between general education and vocational education. However, the current state of family education in China is facing contradictions with the demands of Chinese societal development, both in terms of concepts and practices. These contradictions stem from subjective reasons within families and objective factors in the broader social environment. Therefore, analyzing the current challenges faced by family education in relation to general and vocational education and proposing recommendations to address them holds significant practical importance for advancing the coordinated development of general education and vocational education, benefiting both family education and the broader educational landscape in China.

2. Literature Review

Since the beginning of China's reform and opening-up policy, the country's education sector has seen rapid development, accompanied by emerging contradictions. On one hand, the scale of education, including both compulsory and higher education, has significantly expanded. By the end of 2020, the retention rate of compulsory education had reached a high of 95.2%, and the gross enrollment rate in high school had also reached 91.2%^[2]. However, on the other hand, while education has been expanding, vocational education has lagged behind both in terms of scale and status. With the continuous development of China's economy and society, a talent gap has emerged, particularly in basic and skill-based occupations where there is a shortage of qualified professionals. Meanwhile, the number of

graduates from general education programs continues to rise, while the number of graduates from vocational education programs has not shown significant growth.

The initial approach in China was to separate general education from vocational education, as articulated in the 1985 "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Education System Reform" and later in the 1996 "Vocational Education Law." These policies outlined the strategy of educational stratification, where different stages of education revolved around middle on Promoting the Enrollment Work of Senior High Schools in 2013" issued by the Ministry of Education, which stated that "the enrollment scale of secondary vocational education should continue to be stable, and, in principle, it should guide junior high school graduates to enter secondary vocational schools at a ratio of 50%." This meant that students with lower academic performance would be directed towards vocational schools, intensifying competition for enrollment in general education institutions. It wasn't until 2022 that the newly revised "Vocational Education Law" changed the direction of educational stratification, moving from separating general education and vocational education to promoting their coordinated development. This adjustment did not eliminate the concept of educational stratification but rather aimed to clarify that vocational education holds an equal status with general education.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, family education has gone through three stages: the exploratory stage, the development stage, and the deepening stage^[3]. The period from the founding of the People's Republic of China to before the reform and opening-up can be considered the exploratory stage. During this period, laws and policies related to family education began to emerge. For instance, in 1952, provisional regulations for primary and middle schools were enacted, stipulating that "parent meetings should be held every semester to allow parents to express their opinions and to hear reports from the school on its work^[4]." The Constitution of the People's Republic of China, as well as the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, also mentioned family education, laying the foundation for its development. The period from the reform and opening-up to before the 18th Party Congress can be seen as the development stage of family education. During this period, the government introduced a series of policies that clarified the responsibilities and obligations of family education, providing legal protection and ensuring the stable and continuous development of family education.

From the 18th Party Congress to the present, family education has entered the deepening stage. In the context of the new era, family education has undergone comprehensive reforms and launched two five-year plans for promoting family education: the "Five-Year Plan for Guiding and Promoting Family Education (2010-2015)" and the "Five-Year Plan for Guiding and Promoting Family Education (2016-2020)." In 2020, the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China emphasized the acceleration of education reform and included "improving the mechanism for synergy between families and schools in educating children" in the national 14th Five-Year Plan and the Vision of 2035 for Modernization Development. In 2021, the "Family Education Promotion Law" was enacted. Research and development in Chinese family education have accumulated a substantial body of knowledge, entering a new phase of research that requires continued innovation in the context of the country's developmental needs in the new era.

Based on the above, it is evident that China has undergone long-term development in both the coordinated development of general and vocational education and family education. As the strategy of promoting science and education to build a socialist modernized strong nation remains steadfast, this presents new challenges and requirements for both family education and school education. The question is how to closely align and mutually support the two in the context of the nation's development needs in education in the new era. In other words, how can family education adapt and innovate in the backdrop of the coordinated development of general and vocational education?

3. The Challenges of Family Education

3.1 Outdated Mindsets

The deep-rooted belief that "everything is inferior to education, and reading is the top priority" has been ingrained in the education mindset of Chinese parents for a long time. Throughout the process of educating their children, parents continuously emphasize the importance of general education and prioritize academic achievements. Simultaneously, there is insufficient understanding among parents about vocational education, often perceiving it as an inferior path with limited future prospects, possibly leading to menial labor. However, as society evolves, these outdated notions become increasingly obsolete. Furthermore, parents have traditionally regarded education as the sole responsibility of schools

and teachers, distancing themselves from active involvement in their children's education. This separation between parenting and education has caused parents to overlook the significance of family education, deeming it optional or even unnecessary^[5]. This has led to the predicament of "5+2=0."

Most significantly, since the implementation of the division between general and vocational education in China, enrollment policies in various regions have strictly regulated the number of students admitted to regular high schools and colleges, forcing a significant portion of students into vocational education. Consequently, students with lower academic performance are compelled to pursue vocational education if they wish to continue their studies. This situation has induced widespread parental anxiety, as vocational education is often stigmatized as a second-rate option. To prevent their children from being labeled as underachievers or choosing what is perceived as the "fallback" option, parents overwhelmingly encourage their children to strive for academic excellence and pursue general education. This has exacerbated the intense competition and academic pressure within the realm of general education in recent years. To promote the coordinated development of general and vocational education, it is imperative to address and rectify these outdated mindsets.

3.2 Lack of Competence

The "National Survey Report on the Status of Family Education in China" reveals an unsettling state of affairs in current Chinese family education. Many parents find themselves in a state of confusion and are keen on providing their children with a good education, but often feel overwhelmed by their inability to do so. This inability primarily stems from inappropriate communication and teaching methods. Firstly, there is a prevalent issue of communication problems between Chinese parents and their children, characterized by both a lack of communication and improper communication methods. The survey report indicates that parents seldom engage in meaningful conversations with their children, and as children grow older, communication barriers increase significantly, resulting in a noticeable decline in the frequency of communication.

Regarding communication styles, a stark polarization exists. Some parents adopt a "commanding" approach, habitually demanding that their children comply with their wishes and even resorting to extreme measures to counteract resistance. Conversely, others embrace an "indulgent" style, excessively indulging their children without setting appropriate boundaries. Furthermore, due to biases and misconceptions about vocational education, popularizing and guiding vocational education within families becomes even more challenging. Even when families are supportive of vocational education, the lack of effective educational and communication methods often renders them well-intentioned but ineffectual.

3.3 Low Social Support

The severe internal competition within mainstream education is inseparable from the broader societal context, characterized by a one-sided understanding of vocational education and inadequate emphasis on its importance. Firstly, the majority of businesses exhibit clear disparities in their treatment of vocational and general education when it comes to hiring, which is reflected in aspects such as salaries, benefits, and working conditions. Furthermore, many companies explicitly state in job advertisements that they require candidates to hold a bachelor's degree or higher, with limited consideration for applicants who have received professional vocational education, placing undue emphasis on formal qualifications. As the number of graduates from general education programs continues to rise while vocational education graduates remain relatively stagnant, there is a growing shortage of talent for basic-level positions, contributing to increased employment pressures.

Additionally, the lack of financial investment by the government in vocational education, coupled with insufficient teaching resources and faculty, hampers the development of vocational education itself. As a result, the talent produced often falls short of meeting the requirements for basic-level positions. Moreover, there is a lack of publicity and awareness about vocational education. Many people have limited knowledge about what vocational education entails, why it should be valued, and the kind of professionals it cultivates. It is crucial to enhance public awareness, educate the populace about vocational education, instill trust in it, and encourage parents to consider vocational education as a viable option for their children.

4. Suggestions of Family Education

4.1 Correcting Outdated Notions about Vocational Education in Family Education

The lagging perception of vocational education in families is primarily due to a lack of understanding and insufficient awareness of vocational education. To address this issue, policy-driven guidance is essential. There should be enhanced promotion and explanation of relevant policies, along with targeted vocational education outreach programs for parents. Parents need to understand the employment prospects for graduates of vocational education and gain comprehensive insights into vocational education.

Firstly, there should be educational guidance on vocational education, which not only requires top-level planning but also grassroots implementation. The government should enact relevant policies and outline the general requirements and methods for guiding vocational education within families. Specialized departments and organizations should be established to carry out this work, and performance mechanisms and assessment criteria should be put in place to ensure accountability.

At the grassroots level, practical measures should be taken. Local communities should form specialized teams to engage in in-depth communication with families, addressing the vocational education needs of different stages and subjects.

Secondly, vocational colleges and schools should reach out to families directly because government efforts alone may not entirely transform family perceptions. These institutions should promote their educational philosophies and distinctive features to the general public. They can organize seminars and presentations in communities and neighborhoods to showcase their faculty, campus environment, training programs, the types of professionals they cultivate, and the career opportunities available to graduates. Parents should have firsthand knowledge of the current state and future prospects of vocational education. After the initial promotion, continuous communication with parents should be maintained. Updates on students' progress, school plans, and opportunities for parental involvement should be regularly shared with parents. This will help break down the separation between education and parenting and overcome the "5+2=0" dilemma.

4.2 Establish a family education guidance system to enhance family education capabilities

The current dilemma in family education is that parents, despite understanding the prospects of vocational education, lack appropriate methods to educate the next generation. Incorrect methods only make it increasingly challenging to bridge the communication gap with their children. Enhancing family education capabilities is crucial, but the existing family education guidance and service system in China cannot fully meet the needs of a wide range of families. Comprehensive innovation and reform are needed.

Establish a family education guidance system that meets current development needs. Government departments should formulate and establish a scientific and systematic family education guidance system, guiding all sectors of society to establish a comprehensive education support and service system. External support should be accompanied by internal support, including measures such as free training and counseling, allowances, tax incentives, and more, with effective policy operations, coordinated mechanisms among government departments, and both material and spiritual support^[6].

Expand the scale and number of family education institutions. Currently, there are few specialized family education institutions in China, with most of them integrated into comprehensive educational organizations, limiting their development resources and conditions. Strong support should be provided for the establishment of dedicated family education institutions, allowing them greater autonomy and development space. These institutions can design family education programs, conduct family education guidance and service activities, and be authorized to issue vocational certificates, thereby training high-quality family education instructors and better extending the guidance of family education. While encouraging family education institutions, corresponding evaluation and assessment systems should be established to promote their effectiveness and scientific nature.

Involve schools in family education. School participation is essential for enhancing family education capabilities, leveraging schools' advantages and resources in education. Schools can offer family education courses tailored to different age groups, establish professional teams of family education instructors, and conduct various forms of training and exchange activities to provide targeted guidance and services to parents. Online and offline channels should be developed for parents to access family education information conveniently through modern information technology. Additionally, vocational

schools should pay special attention to their involvement in family education, integrating vocational education concepts into family education guidance activities to enhance parents' education capabilities in vocational education guidance.

5. Conclusions

To address the various challenges faced by family education in the context of coordinated development between general and vocational education, it is not only essential for changes in family attitudes and capacity building but also requires collective participation from the broader society. Together, we can create a social environment that promotes the coordinated development of general and vocational education, encouraging families to naturally adapt to these changes.

Society should intensify its efforts to promote the importance of vocational education. Traditional methods such as advertisements, posters, and slogans should be complemented by modern information channels like social media platforms (e.g., Weibo, Douyin) to change parents' biases against vocational education and update their perceptions. There should be comprehensive campaigns to foster a culture of respect for craftsmanship and reverence for technology.

Organizations and businesses should adapt to the needs of the times by restructuring their job positions and recognizing the importance of foundational and skill-based roles. They should change their perspectives on foundational and skill-based talent, offering competitive compensation, benefits, working conditions, and career advancement opportunities. In the recruitment process, organizations should treat all candidates equally, eliminate educational discrimination, and move away from overemphasizing qualifications from prestigious institutions, exam scores, and academic titles.

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