

Polish Vocational and Adult Education: Status Quo, Dilemma and Way Out

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Abstract—Poland is an important transportation hub for the communication between China and Europe. It is also an important country along the "Belt and Road" line. In the new historical situation, how to better understand the Polish vocational education system has become an urgent task for Polish education researchers. This paper reviews the history and present situation of vocational and adult education in Poland, and analyzes the current difficulties and reform measures of vocational and adult education in Poland. By understanding and studying Polish vocational and adult education, it is of great significance for Chinese educators to correctly understand the current situation of Polish education and further enhance the educational and cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Keywords—Poland; vocational education; adult education

I. INTRODUCTION

Poland has a long history of vocational education and training, and has established a system of primary vocational education and training and continuing vocational education and training. The Polish government believes that the emphasis on vocational skills in vocational education is a key factor in improving the competitiveness of the corporate sector. Therefore, vocational education is included in the national education system. In adult education, Poland encourages individuals and businesses to invest and operate. The government also invests a certain percentage of funds in social continuing education such as adult education. With the development of society and new demands, the state has also established certain channels between the two types of education, and the resources can be shared. Overall, the vocational education and adult education in Poland have a certain system. This paper will focus on the Polish vocational education and adult education system.

II. THE HISTORY OF POLISH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The Polish vocational education and training system is a school-based model and is mainly managed by the Ministry of Education. The vocational education in Poland was first spurred on handicraft. At that time, the main career development path of handicraft apprentices was to improve

their skills through long-term training and "gain experience from various channels". They followed different masters, studied in different countries and participated in the examination of craftsmen held by elders of the industry association, so as to obtain the craftsman qualification. With the Poland independence in 1918, the education system was still divided into elite education and mass education. Vocational education affiliated to mass education is divided into two main types: vocational schools and tutorial schools, whose main task is to provide as many qualified employees as possible. In 1932, a new law on vocational education was introduced, which stipulated that vocational training in craftsmanship was carried out in the form of an apprenticeship system. In addition, students from senior high schools also obtained vocational qualification certificates in special vocational training courses. In the period of 1937-1938, there were 177 public vocational schools, 119 autonomous schools and 637 private schools in Poland. [1] After the Second World War, vocational education courses were carried out in secret. Germany needed the qualified workforce, and vocational schools also developed.

In 1945, Poland began the education restoration reform. Vocational schools are based on eight-year primary education, and a large number of employed and unemployed people actively accepted three-year vocational education. After 1948, the 8-year primary school was changed to a 7-year primary school, and a core course was developed. In 1950, Poland launched the economic development framework program and established the Central Office for Vocational Training, which should be responsible for the reform and development of vocational schools. In 1994, Poland created a new type of school, the four-year technical lyceum, which trained high-quality workers and other middle-level professionals, as well as general secondary education. Graduates could obtain the corresponding certificate through the examination, and apply for the admission permit of higher education institutions with the certificate. If they fail to pass the examination, they will obtain a secondary vocational certificate of the school, which couldn't be used to apply for admission to higher education institutions.

In 2017, the Polish Parliament approved the reform of the education system and implemented the latest education system in the autumn of that year. The education reform would be gradually implemented. The structural reform is the first step, and the next step will be the curriculum reform. The overall reform plan is expected to be completed by 2022. After the reform, Poland will abolish the stage of junior high school of the three-year system, retain the primary stage and high school stage, extend the primary education from the six-year system to the eight-year system, and extend the education of high school and vocational and technical education for one year. The duration of the education is four and five years respectively. The history class of high school and vocational and technical schools increased from 2 hours to 8 hours per week, and courses in geography, biology, chemistry and physics increased from 1 hour to 4 hours. This educational reform will definitely have a profound impact on Polish vocational education system.

III. THE HISTORY AND CURRENT SITUATION OF ADULT EDUCATION IN POLAND

A. *History of Adult Education*

Adult education in Poland has a long history. The basic models of adult education in the 18th century include: eliminating illiteracy in rural community, health education, plant cultivation and the spread of new handicrafts. After Poland lost its independence in the late 18th century (divided by its three neighbors), adult education favored the protection of Polish language, culture, history and tradition. Founded in the late 19th century, the Free University of Poland is the first open university in Poland to engage in adult education. After the First World War, Poland regained its independence and adult education developed rapidly. The Central Bureau of Adult Education is established in 1919. It became the Adult Education Institute in 1928. The Institute published textbooks, extracurricular reading books, theoretical and textbook materials, and journals. It was also the main institution for adult education research.

Adult education in the Polish socialist period (1945-1989) was characterized by centralization, homogenization, and political dominance. The adult education system was no longer autonomous, it became part of a centralized system and no separate adult courses were offered. The term adult education was given a new meaning: "worker training" and "education of working people", non-working people couldn't accept education in adult schools. An important feature of adult education in the socialist era is that it is limited to the qualifications required for work and production in a narrow sense. Off-campus education is very similar to the role of workers' schools, mainly including training for workers and party members and on-the-job training. However, the establishment of off-campus education institutions is strictly controlled by the government, and on-the-job training is conducted at the company. There are also regional and departmental centres for training, on-the-job training and vocational training for different levels of personnel, as well as special institutions for educational activities.

On September 12, 1989, Tadeusz Mazowiecki was formed by the Solidarity Union, including the unified government of the Peasant Party and the Democratic Party, which is called the Third Republic of Poland. Polish adult education has begun a new page. The School Education Act published on September 7, 1991 fundamentally changed the principles of the existing education system. There is only one article in this bill (Article 68) related to adult education, namely, the Minister of National Education and the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, and other related ministers, which will define, manage, optimize the level of vocational qualifications and general adult education. According to the Act, non-public types of adult education have emerged and are growing rapidly, especially in the field of off-campus education.

The School Education Act was amended in 1995. The term "continuing education" appeared. Its functions and implementation methods were also determined. The duties of the Minister of National Education, the Minister of Economy, and the Minister of Labor and Social Policy in the field of continuing education were also detailed. Subsequent revisions to the School Education Act (in 1996, 2001, 2003) have led to more attention in adult education, and changes in legislation have led to improvements in the development of off-campus adult education, as well as the integration of in-school and off-campus adult education systems, and the introduction of the certification system guarantees the quality of off-campus educational institutions. After 2000, the number of Polish training institutions has increased and the range of courses offered has also increased.

B. *Types of Institutions of Adult Education*

Polish adult vocational training and adult general education are provided in schools outside the schools. The adult education of school is provided by primary schools, secondary schools, basic vocational schools, post-secondary schools and higher education institutions. The adult vocational training and adult general education (excepting postgraduate study) outside the schools can be organized in different forms, including public education institutions and non-public educational institutions. The Centre for Continuing Education and Applied Education and the on-the-job training centre are the most common public continuing education institutions. The Continuing Education Centre operates as an adult school.

Adult schools are classified into state-managed institutions, autonomous institutions, social organizations, and associations. Non-public adult education institutions can be operated by social organizations, associations, religious organizations and individuals. The training institution registration and certification implements a dual-regulation system operation. The first system is operated by the local government based on educational regulations. The second system functions much like a registration of training institution (RIS), operated by the regional labor bureau. Postgraduate study in Poland is also considered a form of continuing education and is organized by public and non-public institutions of higher education, research units and the Polish Academy of Sciences.

C. Admission Requirements and Funding Sources of Adult Education

In Poland, anyone over the age of 18 can go to an adult school. The admission requirement of adult education outside the school is prescribed by the education provider. They are usually stipulated according to the objectives of the training. Institutions offering graduate education or programs can determine their own admission requirements if the program requires them.

The unemployed are guided by the Labor Bureau to participate in a standard course identified by the training institution and the employer. If the course is provided in accordance with the employer's direct instructions, the employer's specific requirements should be considered when preparing the training program. In addition, the main entry requirements for training institutions include the applicant's psychological and physical conditions, work experience, some additional skills and other requirements. Training institutions also need to consider the individual requirements of the unemployed.

Adult education in public schools is funded by regional self-government. According to the School Education Act of September 7, 1991 and subsequent revisions, education in public adult schools is free.

Participants are required to pay for education in non-public schools. However, non-public schools have the right to receive funds from the government budget as well as public schools. Adult off-campus educational institutions also have to pay, and the funds of extracurricular forms of continuing education come from government budgets, the income of employers and students, and structural funds. According to a survey conducted by the Polish National Ministry of Education in 2005, most training courses are paid by the students. One third of the funds come from the European Social Fund, with the smallest share of employers [2].

Unemployed students can increase their chances of finding a job through training or retraining. Polish law stipulates that training to improve professional qualifications or increase professional skills can be funded from the Labor Fund, which was established in 2004 and relies solely on employer input. The county labor department is responsible for providing training programs and other forms of professional activities for unemployed or other people who need to find a job.

In Poland, there is no nationwide funding model for adult education. The only systematically funded system for adult education is to train the unemployed who are looking for a job. Its legal basis is the law on promoting employment and labor market institutions. Employers can establish an institutional training fund to fund or jointly fund training for employers or employees. Such funds can also be established by several employers in accordance with the agreement, and training for unemployed persons can be paid by the labor fund. Anyone who has a training intention can get training. He/she can also apply for a training loan to participate in the training, even if the course he/she participated in is not

approved by the labor department. If an employer needs his/her employees to participate in a specific type of training or on-the-job training, the employee can ask the employer for financial support.

D. Certification of Adult Education

After completing the studies at a public adult school, students have the opportunity to obtain a certificate or national diploma. Model certificates and other documents related to the school are defined by the Minister of Education in a separate regulation. This applies to both public and non-public schools and other institutions operating under the Education Act. In 1993, a decision made by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy defined the principles and conditions for upgrading vocational education, general adult education, and completing a course to obtain a diploma. The Management Board of the Federation of Scientific-Technical Associations, NOT and the Management Board of the Polish Economic Society have the right to award a certificate of professional specialization for adult students who have completed higher or secondary education.

IV. POLISH VOCATIONAL AND ADULT EDUCATION: DILEMMAS AND REFORM MEASURES

A. Problems Faced by Polish Vocational and Adult Education

1) *The marginalization of vocational and adult education in the national education reform:* In May 2015, the Polish Right Party Law and Justice Party won the general election. The result of the election is the choice of the so-called "revolution" group, who are eager for greater change, and this educational reform can be seen as an important part of the big reform. After the reform, Poland will abolish the stage of junior high school of the three-year system, retain the primary stage and high school stage, extend the primary education from the six-year system to the eight-year system, and extend the education of high school and vocational and technical education for one year. The duration of the education is four and five years respectively. The reform draft has formulated compulsory and elective courses, and has prescribed the teaching subjects and teaching time for each grade. In terms of curriculum setting, eight-year compulsory education in primary schools offers classic education courses to enable students to obtain general education. Courses in philosophy, art and music are offered to lay the foundation for future academic and artistic development. In addition, the law and Justice Party are actively promoting the education of "patriotic values".

Although the reform is implemented in the entire field of education, it is mainly the specific requirements for the development of students' academic ability in the middle school period. It does not elaborate on the study of vocational education courses for students. Therefore, vocational education in Poland is still on the verge of

national education reform and is not fully integrated into the reform of education.

In fact, this confirms that vocational education is an accessory to the mainstream of Polish education reform, mainly in the incompatibility of vocational education policies with other secondary education policies in the secondary education stage. The focus of vocational education is career education, and vocational education should be the core policy for students to continue their studies and enter their careers. Vocational education should be the mainstream in education reform. However, the reality is that vocational education is regarded as a substitute for formal academic education, a choice for students who are not suitable for entering the university, and is marginalized in the national education reform.

2) *Lack of information on Polish vocational and adult education assessment data:* The current data collected by the Polish vocational education assessment is limited and cannot be used to analyze the various outcomes of Polish vocational education development. Lack of adequate data is one of the biggest obstacles in current vocational education assessments. Similarly, insufficient data is also a challenge for both professional education administrators and executor. The most obvious is the lack of relevant tracking data after high school graduation. It is impossible to accurately calculate or predict the impact of vocational education on students' further education or career.

The unity and authenticity of data information is the premise and basis for the validity of quantitative research results. The reliability of data affects the availability of results. However, Poland implements a decentralization system in education management. The management of various types of education is in the local education management department. The local education department has the right to develop vocational education in the region and has its own regulations on vocational education. This makes the data collected in the assessment lack consistency, which seriously affects the effectiveness and availability of the overall assessment of vocational education in Poland. At the same time, the appropriateness of the data collection time also has an important impact on the evaluation results. Premature or late data collection is not conducive to ensuring the validity of the results.

3) *Lack of supervision makes the quality of vocational and adult education passable:* Graduates of vocational education and training institutions often fail to meet employer expectations due to the lack of effective assessment, supervision and continuous improvement measures. Many training institutions conduct follow-up surveys on graduates to understand their career development and their views on training. However, the findings of these surveys have not been widely used to improve training programs and learning content. Further initiatives based on industry feedback and follow-up research are yet to be implemented. Insufficient government funding is also an important factor of the poor quality of vocational education

and training in Poland. Due to limited government investment and inadequate training facilities, the technology taught and used in training is relatively backward and outdated. This has led many training institutions to focus on low-skilled training rather than to train the high-level skilled laborers for the industry.

4) *New requirements and challenges for Polish vocational and adult education by EU education standards:* Since 1992, the EU has begun to develop a unified education culture and training policy. In 1996, lifelong learning began in Europe and the first lifelong learning memorandum was introduced in 2000. Currently, the EU has four projects within the framework of lifelong learning: the Comenius project on primary and secondary education, the Da Vinci project on vocational education and training, the Erasmus project on university education, and the Gelongwei project on adult education. They form the four pillars of the European education system and contribute to the global competitiveness of European social models. The launch of the Gelongwei project on adult education is both an opportunity and a challenge for the development of adult education in Poland. It requires the Polish government and all sectors of society to reform adult education to meet the requirements of the Gelongwei project.

B. Reform Measures of Vocational and Adult Education

Despite facing a series of problems and shortcomings, the Polish government regards vocational and technical education as an important tool to promote its future economic development. Against such a background, its government has taken the following important measures to improve the appeal and quality of vocational and technical education.

1) *Fully integrating vocational and adult education into the overall framework of Polish education reform:* In 1993, the Ministry of Education in Poland introduced a new professional classification method, which divided the professions in vocational education into 138. [3] In adapting to the new professional classification, Poland spent a long time on the reform and adjustment of the curriculum. In 1997, the training courses offered by most schools were still set based on traditional professional classification. The reason is that Poland lacks attention to vocational education and strong policy guarantees in the education reform system. Therefore, through the reform of the academic curriculum and teaching methods in the vocational education curriculum, it becomes a part of the national education reform. Finally, any policy reform of the country will have an impact on vocational education. Vocational education can closely follow the education reform steps, and constantly improve their own development.

2) *Fully and timely accessing to information on the effectiveness of vocational education assessment:* Student's learning is an ever-changing process. The statistics of data related to vocational education and learning should be based

on the collection of longitudinal data of students' "learning career". Therefore, in order to analyze the impact of vocational education on student's achievement, it is necessary to obtain longitudinal data of individual students in their elective courses, core courses, career areas and post-secondary courses. The Polish education sector should provide non-regulatory guidance, and vocational education managers and policy makers need to identify a clear, consistent, well-defined definition and operability data for measurement indicators as the indicators of the effectiveness of data information. At the same time, local education departments should be encouraged to establish a unified database system, connect the various management databases, and make full use of these research data to answer important issues related to vocational education. At the same time, they should supervise the implementation of vocational education by establishing a series of centralized operational indicators to prepare for students continuing their studies or entering a career.

3) *Paying attention to the application of modern technology in vocational and adult education, and strictly supervising and managing teachers:* Polish vocational education should pay attention to the application of modern technology in the content of the course, and should emphasize the timeliness of teachers' knowledge update. The application of modern information technology and distance education in vocational education is conducive to the professional development of vocational teachers, which is conducive to solving the imbalance between teachers of different sources in theoretical and practical teaching ability. It has strong pertinence and timeliness, and will improve the social adaptability of vocational teachers. At the teacher management level, the ecologicalization and sustainability of teacher training should be emphasized. At present, Poland has clear legal provisions on the appointment of full-time and part-time teachers, and the assessment of teachers is very strict. If teachers have negative evaluations of two indicators within one year in the term of office, they may be fired. However, the Polish education sector should also focus on the establishment of a teacher information feedback system and a quality assessment system to provide additional training for in-service teachers to achieve higher education, which will also provide the direction for in-depth development of teachers' teaching level and their own career planning.

V. CONCLUSION

Poland is an important transportation hub for communication between China and Europe. The implementation of the "Belt and Road" strategy is also a historical opportunity for Poland to share the bonus of China's economic development. In the new historical situation, how to better understand the Polish vocational education system has become an urgent task for Polish education researchers. By understanding and studying Polish vocational and adult education, it is of great significance for

Chinese educators to correctly understand the current situation of Polish education and further enhance the educational and cultural exchanges between the two countries. It is foreseeable that under the efforts of China and Poland, and with the continuous development of Chinese education in Poland, Poland will surely become an important partner and beneficiary under China's "Belt and Road" strategy.

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