



The Development of Vocational Education in China

Yixuan Tian^(✉)

School of Modern Language, University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 1BJ, Hampshire, UK

yt2n21@soton.ac.uk

Abstract. The double reduction strategy in China refers to the government's planned student burden reduction agenda while another regulation, known as "Secondary Streaming," ensures that the number of pupils enrolled in vocational high schools and regular high schools is roughly equal, indicating that students are currently encouraged to attend vocational colleges and universities by the state. Following the implementation of these two rules, several Chinese students have turned to vocational education as a viable option. Many parents and students, on the other hand, have preconceived notions and reservations about vocational education institutions. This study reviews the history and policy evolution of vocational education in China, as well as the current issues in the field, and provides some suggestions to help these challenges be addressed appropriately in the future.

Keywords: Vocational education · Historical and policy developments · China

1 Introduction

China has continued to implement new rules that are being tested in a bunch of areas to improve the exam-oriented school environment and accomplish the goal of quality education. It is committed to identifying the most effective education policies currently in place and promoting them on a large scale. Although each policy change is tiny in quantity, they occur frequently, such as the "double reduction" which reduces the burden of homework and off-campus instruction for students in compulsory education to build a high-quality education system in China, resulting in after-school extended hours services and secondary school triage.

Although the fact that the double reduction policy has decreased students' academic burdens, wealthy families continue to hire private tutors to boost their children's academic performance, which is widening the gap between kids with average or low academic achievement effectively. Currently, a small number of "self-employed" private teachers and some in-service teachers provide compensated private coaching. Simultaneously, several off-campus training institutes have begun to change and expand the topic tutoring sector, resulting in tutoring conduct that is utilitarian and exam-oriented. As a result of marketability and profit-seeking, it will also evolve into a more concealed subterranean form [1].

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The most recent policy, set to be implemented in 2022, is a revision to the “Secondary Streaming” policy, which aims to increase the proportion of Secondary Streaming and ensure that the number of students attending vocational and ordinary high schools is nearly equal. Because of the Secondary Streaming (SSC) policy, which has increased the ratio of general education to vocational education to 5:5, the importance of the SSC exams has risen dramatically. After all, if kids cannot even enter high school, they almost lose their chance to study and let alone get into university. If a student is not accepted into high school, he or she has just two options: vocational high school or working in society. In addition, this pattern throughout the world, and anecdotally observed that participants in upper-secondary schools in China tend to come from poorer families [2].

Technical education and skill training, particularly for vocations that need manual or practical talents, are referred to as vocational education and training (VET). Informal vocational and technical education (e.g., lower and senior secondary schools and post-secondary institutions) and training outside the formal education system (e.g., pre-employment training and on-the-job-training institutions) are the main two types [3]. Since the formation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government has put a high value on vocational education and training. The Vocational Education Law of 1996 and the State Council’s Decision on Vigorously Promoting the Reform and Development of VET in 2002 reflect the government’s increased efforts to support VET during the reform and openness period. More reform initiatives are being a consideration. More revisions have been implemented in recent years to update the country’s existing VET system. However, many parents are hesitant to send their children to vocational or postsecondary schools. Low-quality vocational education, student preconceptions, and every parent’s desire for their child to seek more sophisticated and acceptable employment are all potential explanations.

This paper aims to review not only the history and policy development but also the current dilemmas of vocational education in China to see how to improve the current situation. Furthermore, in terms of the policies that have been implemented thus far, this study recommends several solutions to the current troubles of vocational education in China, which will provide implications for the future education area.

As a result, this study is divided into four pieces. The history of vocational education in China will be discussed in the next section. The final section will show the evolution of vocational education policy. The fourth portion will look at China’s present problem with vocational education.

2 History of Vocational Education in China

Technical and vocational education (TVE) in China has evolved over the years. It may trace back to the 1860s when industrial and commercial education was first introduced.

This historical period could be divided into two halves, according to the Westernization Movement. In the aftermath of China’s defeat in the Opium War in 1840, the Qing leadership and certain patriots reflected on the country’s poor military and economic technology, vowing to aggressively absorb superior Western technology. As a result, technicians and workers with superior technological expertise were increasingly important for the construction of military industries.

The earliest TVE in China was geared for industrial development in the 1860s, with the primary goal of studying Western technology and equipping workers with transferable skills. In 1904, the Qing government passed the Imperial Schools Constitution, which integrated industrial and formal education.

Military and industrial colleges were created after that, including the Mawei Boating College in Fujian Province in 1866, the Shanghai Manufacture Bureau's Machinery College in 1867, and the Fuzhou Boating Factory's Driving College in 1873. These companies developed from the Westernization Movement and have all contributed significantly to China's military and economic development. As a result, the Qing dynasty defined the educational standing of industrial and commercial education. The current vocational education system was founded on the foundation of full-time and multiple levels of vocational schools.

The Qing Dynasty's reign of terror came to an end in 1911 with China's first civic revolt against feudalism, ushering in a new era in the development of vocational education. Huang Yanpei, Cai Yuanpei, Tao Xingzhi, and others founded the Chinese Vocational Education Society in 1917. They paved the way for China's education and industrial sectors to collaborate on vocational education. It was the first organization in modern China dedicated to the study, provision, and promotion of technical and vocational education. The organization assisted its members in expanding their knowledge and abilities in agriculture, industry, and commerce, ushering in a new era of technical and vocational education [5].

TVE has undergone a process of calibration, modification, embodiment, revision, betterment, and finally sustainable development since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

To begin with, many specially trained secondary schools and highly qualified schools were founded in the 1950s to meet the demands of economic growth. During the first national education conference after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the customary condition of a gap between general education and TVE was raised. The State Council released the Decision on Improving Secondary Technical and Vocational Education in 1954 to reform and develop secondary vocational education, and the Ministry of Education issued the Secondary Special Schools Regulation in the meantime. As a result, China's TVE system has become more focused on secondary vocational and technical schools. Secondary technical and vocational education met the needs of economic development to a large extent. By 1957, there were 844,833 students enrolled in secondary vocational and technical institutions, accounting for 48.3% of total students [5]. Between 1958 and 1976, China's technical and vocational education grew rapidly, with many new vocational schools opening and numerous students enrolling.

However, the rate of development of TVE, on the other hand, was greatly delayed during the "Cultural Revolution," with the secondary school period being reduced from six to four years, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of secondary school pupils [5]. It had a significant negative impact on the growth of vocational education and lowered the quality of general education. Even the big technical schools were shut down.

The Compulsory Education Act of 1986 addressed universal secondary education by mandating three years of junior secondary education, marking the beginning of compulsory education. With education reform, however, the goal of improving the quality of large junior secondary schools overtook the goal of expanding enrolment. Vocational education became even more important after the announcement of the Outline on Reform and Development of Education in China in 1993. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council wrote it. It requires all levels of government to place high importance on vocational education, devise comprehensive strategies for its implementation, and promote vocational education energetically. The strategy aimed to unite all departments, corporations, institutions, and other sectors of society in their efforts to provide vocational education in a variety of formats and at various levels.

Currently, China is working to build a TVE system that ensures the simultaneous and interrelated development of school education and short-term training while accounting for regional disparities in economic and social development.

3 Policies Development

Economic and societal changes are posing severe challenges to the growth of vocational education in China [6]. Decades of policy reform have resulted in progress, but there are serious doubts about its sufficiency remain.

At the 97th meeting of the Government Affairs Council on the 10th of August in 1951, Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier, stated that the previous Chinese educational system was modelled after that of Japan and afterwards the United States. Despite certain changes, it was still classified as a capitalist educational system. The Government Council issued the Decision on Reforming the Length of Schooling System on the 1st of October in 1951, stating that China's original educational system has many flaws, the most serious of which is the cadre school for workers and farmers, as well as various cram schools and training classes, which have no due status in the school system [7].

Furthermore, officials realized that labourers and farmers who got vocational education had a poor social position. Several vocational schools were changed to general schools to close the educational gap among students. In May 1985, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China released the Decision on Education Reform, judging the overall situation of vocational education: "In China, vocational-technical education is the weakest link in the complete education chain" [8].

Deng Xiaoping's southern tour speech and the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China both proposed the establishment of a socialist market economic system at the beginning of 1992. Since Deng Xiaoping's open-door policy was released in the late 1970s, Chinese vocational education has demonstrated enormous energy in its development [9]. The Chinese government has published and implemented a succession of vocational education policies during the last two decades to meet the prerequisites for its economic transition to what is allegedly a socialist market economy. Colleges and universities were extended from 1999 to 2006. Vocational schools are unable to develop due to a lack of pupils. Resources must be allocated at the national level to address the educational gap, instead of abandoning vocational education.

The recent policy has not made many significant changes. Previously, there was no distinction between ordinary and vocational high schools in terms of enrolment. The “Decision on Accelerating the Development of Modern Vocational Education” was published by the State Council in June 2014, and it was widely adopted to accelerate the development of modern professional education. It outlined the overarching philosophy, core concepts, goals, tasks, tactics, and measures for advancing contemporary vocational education in the coming years. Secondly, “Advancing the Growth of a Modern Vocational Education System,” specifies that “professional higher vocational colleges should work closely with industry, universities, and research institutes to cultivate technical and technical individuals serving regional development” [10]. Higher vocational education should include the school’s current circumstances as well as a variety of successful ways, which strives to create a new professional vocational education centring on “talents as the centre, employers’ satisfaction as the standard” [11]. After 2021, all areas will require a balanced proportion of regular and vocational high schools, with vocational education enrolling a growing proportion of pupils.

4 Challenges and Proposed Strategies

However, China’s Vocational Education and Training (VET) have numerous challenges, which should be solved in the future:

4.1 The Low Quality of the Academic Study

The key factors include a lack of societal investment, a high level of government participation, and a lack of academic flexibility. Furthermore, children are classified into several school categories based on their entrance exam scores, with vocational schools being treated as second-class institutions. There is a scarcity of qualified teachers and instructors in vocational institutions [12].

4.2 Less Required Skills to Improve Students’ Competence

This is due in part to the manpower planning paradigm that guided the growth of several of the schools [13]. However, as the lifespan of work skills shortens and China’s economy shifts, VET will need to include more general education to prepare people to be more adaptable and capable of learning new skills.

4.3 Few Ties to the Industry

In China, more effective ties between schools and workplaces are required. To improve attitudes toward higher vocational education among employers, graduates, and their families, philosophical change at the local and government levels is required [14]. Although ties between VET institutions and industry exist, they are not as strong as they are in the best systems. Some VET institutions, for example, have modern facilities but no modern equipment, leaving graduates underqualified for today’s labour market. Typically, scheduled employment experiences at the end of a semester last only a few weeks.

They rarely have the kind of sequential and supervised learning and work interaction that characterizes the world's best systems. Although they normally combine the most innovative industries and global standards, foreign-owned enterprises do not appear to be linked to VET schools. Many employers do not consider certifications from VET institutions when making recruiting decisions [13].

4.4 A Low Public Perception

A cultural issue exists in addition to the fragile linkages to industry. The Chinese concept that "those who conduct mental labour may rule those who perform manual labour" traces back to Confucius' Analects and has shaped how the Chinese view knowledge and education [13]. These differences between academic and practical education exist in other countries, but they are more pronounced in China. As a result, the public regards vocational education as low status.

4.5 Intensive Social Competitiveness

The purpose of vocational education before and after China's founding was to prepare more skilled people to meet the needs of the economy and scientific and technological growth. As China enters the twenty-first century, the globalized economy expands, and the demand for highly educated people grows, an increasing number of people choose general education as a way of continuing their education. As a result, vocational education has gradually become a feasible choice for certain students who have struggled in the classroom. Furthermore, it is a fact that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, such as migrant families and rural inhabitants, engage in vocational education. Extrapolating the findings beyond the study group of low-performing children, on the other hand, should be done with caution, as doing so could exacerbate the situation. As China enters the twenty-first century, the globalized economy expands, and the demand for highly educated people grows, an increasing number of people choose general education as a way of continuing their education. As a result, vocational education has gradually become a feasible choice for certain students who have struggled in the classroom. Furthermore, it is a fact that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, such as migrant families and rural inhabitants, engage in vocational education. However, extrapolating the findings beyond the study group of low-performing pupils should be done with caution, as this may risk perpetuating an underclass through educational policy [15].

5 Conclusion

By examining the evolution of vocational education in China, it is clear that the demand for qualified workers is becoming more and more crucial with the development of the economy. Raising social acknowledgement of vocational education is critical, which is a key element of increasing parental and student acceptance of vocational education. Furthermore, society and businesses should not be preoccupied with job candidates' excellent academic qualifications that qualified people are turned away. Even if they

believe it is beneficial to master a talent, parents and kids will avoid becoming technically adept for fear of not being recognized in today's culture, which expects high qualifications. As a result, the government should adopt a set of measures to entice parents and children to pursue vocational education. The government should, for example, provide employment incentives to competent workers. Schools are recommended to provide students with structured and appropriately compensated internships. During the application process, vocational institutions can also hold information sessions at schools. As a result, more funding will be available for vocational education, and there will be a promising future in this field.

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