Suspended Policy Goals and the Triple Gap in Grassroots Calligraphy Education Implementation

Shutong Di

School of Arts, Qilu Institute of Technology-Qufu, Jining, 272000, China
3368198791@qq.com

Abstract. As a core carrier of China's traditional culture, Chinese calligraphy has been systematically incorporated into the national curriculum system and the policy framework for aesthetic education in recent years. However, whether increasingly refined top-level policy design can necessarily achieve its intended objectives remains an open question. Drawing on public policy implementation theory and taking Lvliang City, Shanxi Province, China, as a case study, this article systematically examines the practical gaps that arise in the implementation of calligraphy education policies at the grassroots level. The study combines policy text analysis with semi-structured interviews involving ten grassroots education administrators, calligraphy teachers, parents, and government officials. The findings indicate that, although a relatively systematic national policy framework for calligraphy education has been established, implementation in third-tier cities generally faces three major challenges: the gradual attenuation and selective execution of policy directives during transmission, the insufficient provision of full-time teachers and the marginalization of calligraphy instruction, and the joint compression of the space for aesthetic education by parents' utilitarian demands and the out-of-school training market. This article reveals the actual transmission mechanism through which calligraphy education policies move from policy texts to classroom practice. It provides grassroots empirical evidence for understanding the implementation difficulties of traditional culture education policies and offers theoretical implications for the optimization of related policies.

Keywords: Calligraphy Education, Public Policy Implementation, Policy Implementation Gap, Qualitative Research, Semi-structured Interview.

1 Introduction

Calligraphy is a concentrated expression of the art of Chinese character writing. It combines the instrumental function of language and writing with the spiritual and cultural dimensions of aesthetic expression, and occupies a central position within China's traditional cultural system [1]. Since the beginning of the new era, the inheritance and promotion of outstanding traditional Chinese culture have been elevated to the level of a national strategy. As one of the most recognizable symbols of Chinese culture, calligraphy has consequently received sustained attention from policymakers. Since China's Ministry of Education incorporated calligraphy into the primary and secondary

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school curriculum through a dedicated policy document in 2011, a series of national policy documents concerning calligraphy education have been issued [2]. These documents have introduced increasingly specific requirements regarding curriculum development, teacher training, assessment, and supervision. From the perspective of policy texts, calligraphy education has gradually developed from a relatively peripheral area of interest cultivation into an institutionalized practice covering the entire educational process. However, the increasing intensity and refinement of policy implementation have not automatically translated into substantive changes in grassroots schools. A substantial body of research and numerous media reports indicate that, in many parts of central and western China, calligraphy courses continue to be marginalized, the shortage of qualified teachers remains serious, and classroom instruction is often reduced to a formal exercise [3]. Thus, on the one hand, policy design has become increasingly comprehensive and detailed. On the other hand, grassroots implementation has remained weak and ineffective for an extended period. This pattern of strong policy emphasis at the higher administrative levels but limited implementation at the grassroots level constitutes one of the most significant structural contradictions in the current development of calligraphy education. The existence of this contradiction gives urgent practical significance to an academic examination of the implementation process of calligraphy education policies.

Against this background, this article aims to answer the following three interrelated research questions. First, what is the actual status of national calligraphy education policy implementation in grassroots schools, and have key indicators, such as curriculum provision, teacher allocation, and instructional content, reached the standards anticipated in policy design? Second, what specific obstacles emerge during the policy implementation process, and do these obstacles primarily result from resource constraints, deficiencies in institutional design, or conflicts among the objectives and interests of multiple stakeholders? Third, from the theoretical perspective of public policy implementation, what feasible approaches can be proposed to optimize the implementation mechanisms of calligraphy education policies?

By comparing firsthand interview data with relevant policy texts, this article takes Lvliang City in Shanxi Province as a specific case and reveals the gap between calligraphy education policies and their implementation in practice. The theoretical significance of the study lies in applying public policy implementation theory to the analysis of traditional culture education policies. Through a micro-level case study, it examines the mechanisms through which policy intentions are attenuated during the transmission process, thereby enriching the application of policy implementation theory in the context of Chinese education policy. The practical significance of the study lies in providing empirical references for local governments and education authorities to identify the actual obstacles to policy implementation and to formulate more targeted implementation strategies.

2 Theoretical Foundation and Policy Background

2.1 Public Policy Implementation Theory

As a central link in the policy process, the academic study of public policy implementation emerged in the United States during the 1970s. Pressman & Wildavsky argued that policy failure often results not from deficiencies in the policy itself, but from the complexity of the implementation process and the difficulties involved in coordinating multiple actors [4]. The policy implementation process model proposed by Smith provides an important analytical framework for understanding these issues [5]. Smith identified four core variables that influence implementation outcomes, including the idealized policy, the implementing organization, the target group, and the environmental factors surrounding policy implementation. The degree of compatibility among these four variables determines whether policy objectives can be effectively translated into practical outcomes. He & Kong further noted that policy implementation in China involves complex processes of "layered reinforcement" and "layered attenuation" [6]. Institutional factors, including central local relations, interdepartmental barriers, the resource endowments of local governments, and official incentive structures, can exert a profound influence on the implementation process.

Drawing on the theoretical perspectives outlined above, this article conceptualizes the implementation of calligraphy education policies as a complex interactive process involving multiple actors, including the central government, local governments, schools, individual teachers, students' parents, and commercial training institutions. The analysis focuses on the mechanisms and underlying causes through which policy objectives undergo "deformation" and "attenuation" during their top-down transmission and implementation.

2.2 The Evolution of Chinese Calligraphy Education Policies

A systematic review of major policy documents issued since 2011 shows that Chinese calligraphy education policies have undergone a clear process of progressive development. In 2011, the Ministry of Education issued the "Opinions on Carrying out Calligraphy Education in Primary and Secondary Schools" [2]. This document incorporated calligraphy education into the primary and secondary school teaching system for the first time through an official policy instrument. It explicitly required schools to arrange one calligraphy class per week within the Chinese language curriculum for students in Grades 3 to 6. This marked the transition of calligraphy education from an extracurricular activity to a curriculum-based form of instruction. In 2013, the Ministry of Education issued the "Guidelines for Calligraphy Education in Primary and Secondary Schools" as a supporting document [2]. The guidelines further specified the teaching objectives, content requirements, and assessment recommendations for different educational stages. They also proposed, for the first time, a staged teaching system and corresponding instructional models, while incorporating the implementation of calligraphy education into the scope of educational supervision. In 2017, the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the

State Council issued the "Opinions on Implementing the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture" [2]. The document listed calligraphy alongside traditional art forms such as opera and traditional Chinese painting as a key area of national cultural inheritance and development. It called for excellent traditional Chinese culture to be integrated throughout the entire process of national education. As a result, calligraphy education was elevated from the level of subject-specific instruction to that of an integral component of the national cultural strategy.

During the 2020s, policy design underwent further development toward greater systematization and integration. The "Guidelines for Teaching Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture in Primary and Secondary School Curricula", issued in 2021, positioned calligraphy as a "spiritual and cultural skill" and emphasized its role as a core carrier of traditional culture education [2]. The 2022 version of the compulsory education curriculum plan and curriculum standards incorporated calligraphy instruction into both the Chinese language and art curricula, thereby establishing its formal position within the aesthetic education system. The objectives of instruction were no longer limited to technical practice, but also emphasized the development of students' aesthetic abilities and their basic knowledge of the history of Chinese calligraphy. The "Notice on Further Strengthening Education in Standardized Chinese Character Writing in Primary and Secondary Schools", issued in 2024, addressed the practical challenge of declining handwriting ability in the digital age [7]. It reaffirmed the organic unity of standardized writing posture, standardized instruction, and cultural inheritance. In 2025, the Ministry of Education and seven other departments issued the "Opinions on Deepening the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Chinese Language and Culture" [8]. This document further proposed the establishment of a public-oriented framework for the popularization of calligraphy culture based on the principle that "everyone can learn and learning can take place everywhere," thereby promoting the extension of calligraphy education from schools to families and society.

The evolutionary trajectory reflected in these policy documents can be summarized in four transformations. First, calligraphy education has gradually moved from a subsidiary component of the Chinese language curriculum toward an independent carrier of aesthetic education and traditional culture education. Second, it has developed from a single requirement concerning the provision of classes into a systematic instructional framework covering different stages of learning, the entire educational process, and multiple dimensions of teaching. Third, the scope of implementation has expanded from classroom instruction to broader spaces, including campus cultural development, social practice activities, and digital communication. Fourth, the focus of evaluation has gradually shifted from quantitative indicators, such as whether courses are offered, toward qualitative concerns regarding instructional effectiveness. Nevertheless, whether the refinement and expansion of policy texts have been translated into substantive practices in grassroots schools remains the central issue addressed by this empirical study.

3 Research Method

3.1 Research Strategy and Case Selection

This study adopts a qualitative case study strategy that combines policy text analysis with semi-structured interviews. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the central concern of this study is how calligraphy education policies are implemented at the grassroots level and why deviations occur during implementation. Addressing these questions requires an in-depth examination of the complex interactions among participants' subjective experiences, behavioral motivations, and institutional environments. Quantitative methods are less capable of capturing the nuanced mechanisms underlying these processes.

Lvliang City in Shanxi Province is selected as the research site for three main reasons. First, the researcher has local ties to Lvliang City and can effectively access key informants through family and social networks. In the context of sensitive discussions and shared local concerns, this form of access has important methodological value, as it may facilitate trust and encourage more candid responses. Second, as a typical third-tier city in central and western China, Lvliang has a relatively lower-middle level of economic development, educational resources, and cultural infrastructure compared with other areas of the country. The implementation of calligraphy education policies in Lvliang can therefore reflect, to a considerable extent, the common difficulties encountered in many central and western regions, giving the case a certain degree of representativeness. Third, a member of the researcher's family serves as a school leader at a local public primary school. This connection enables the researcher to obtain in-depth interview opportunities and access to firsthand information that may have been difficult for an external researcher to acquire, thereby providing a distinctive advantage for data collection in this study.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interview

Interview data were collected primarily between April and May 2026, during which the researchers conducted a three-week field study in Lvliang City. A semi-structured interview approach was adopted. Before the interviews, an interview guide was developed on the basis of the research questions. The guide covered several dimensions, including participants' awareness of relevant policies, the current provision of calligraphy courses in schools, teacher allocation, instructional resource provision, parental perceptions and participation, and the principal difficulties encountered during policy implementation. At the same time, interviewees were encouraged to discuss issues they considered important. The researcher provided only moderate guidance in order to ensure that the information collected remained as close as possible to the interviewees' actual experiences and perceptions.

A total of ten interviews were conducted with participants from four key groups. Five participants were school administrators and teachers. Three parents were interviewed, and all of their children had participated in different types of calligraphy training courses outside school. This sampling strategy was intended to capture parents'

actual motivations for and perceptions of choosing extracurricular training rather than relying solely on school-based education. Two local government officials were also interviewed. One was responsible for education administration, while the other was involved in cultural development. Their participation was intended to provide insight into the perspectives of administrative actors responsible for policy implementation.

Each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes, with a total interview duration of approximately six hours. With the informed consent of the participants, all interviews were audio-recorded. The interview data were strictly anonymized. Any information that could reveal the identity of a participant was removed or replaced with a pseudonym in the manuscript. These measures were adopted to protect participants' privacy and to enable them to express their views honestly without concerns about potential professional risks. Table 1 presents the basic information of all respondents.

Table 1. Profile of interview participants.

ID	Role/Position	Gender	Interview duration
T1	Vice principal of a public primary school	Male	45 minutes
T2	Chinese language teacher and part-time calligraphy teacher	Female	40 minutes
T3	Part-time calligraphy teacher with specialized training in calligraphy	Male	35 minutes
T4	Art teacher and part-time calligraphy teacher	Female	30 minutes
T5	Teacher in charge of the calligraphy club	Female	30 minutes
P1	Student's parent	Female	25 minutes
P2	Student's parent	Male	20 minutes
P3	Student's parent	Female	25 minutes
G1	Local government education administrator	Male	40 minutes
G2	Local government culture administrator	Male	35 minutes

Note: The letter prefix in each participant ID indicates the respondent's role category: T = teacher or school administrator; P = parent; G = government official.

The table above shows that the respondents are evenly distributed by gender, with five male and five female participants. Their professional roles cover four key domains: school administration, frontline teaching, family education, and government administration. The interview durations are generally balanced, and the information obtained is sufficiently comparable across participants.

3.3 Data Analysis Strategy

The interview data would be analyzed using thematic analysis, following the steps outlined below. First, the researcher repeatedly should read all interview transcripts to become familiar with the dataset and develop an overall understanding of its content. Second, the transcripts could be subjected to initial coding. Key concepts, behavioral descriptions, and value judgments are identified and labeled on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis. For example, statements such as "class time is taken up by other subjects," "there are no officially established teaching posts," "parents only care about examination

scores," and "policy becomes weakened once it reaches the grassroots level" could be assigned as independent codes.

Third, the initial codes might be clustered and consolidated. Codes with similar meanings should be grouped into secondary themes. For instance, the codes "class time is occupied by major subjects," and "calligraphy classes are canceled or replaced," were consolidated into the secondary theme of "curricular marginalization." Fourth, the core themes would be developed on the basis of the secondary themes. Three core themes were ultimately identified: "policy attenuation during transmission," "structural discontinuity in the provision of teaching posts," and "the combined pressure exerted by parents' utilitarian demands and the profit-driven expansion of the training market." These themes correspond to three dimensions of the gap between policy objectives and implementation outcomes. During the analysis, the researcher also held two discussions with peer reviewers to cross-check the appropriateness of the thematic framework and the accuracy of the coding. These procedures were intended to enhance the credibility of the analytical findings.

4 Findings

Based on a systematic analysis of the interview data, this study identifies three gaps in the implementation of calligraphy education policies in Lvliang City. These gaps correspond to three dimensions, and the following sections discuss these gaps in sequence.

4.1 The First Gap: Gradual Attenuation and Selective Implementation in Policy Transmission

The findings reveal a clear "decay chain" between national policy documents and practices at the grassroots school level. Several interviewees independently observed that the intended objectives of central policies are gradually diluted during their transmission through different administrative levels and ultimately become no more than minimum requirements at the school level. T1 stated candidly: "*Although national policies attach considerable importance to calligraphy education, in practice, limitations related to instructional time and academic assessment make it difficult for us to schedule calligraphy as a formal subject. In most cases, it can only be incorporated into school clubs or after-school services. Once the policy reaches the grassroots level, its requirements are weakened."* This statement clearly illustrates the first reduction in the implementation of policy objectives. Under academic pressure and the rigid constraints of the school timetable, schools have effectively downgraded calligraphy from a formal curricular requirement to an extracurricular or after-school activity.

The attenuation of policy transmission is also reflected in the substantial discrepancy between "nominal provision" and "actual instruction." Although national policies explicitly require calligraphy classes to be offered weekly to students in Grades 3 to 6, T5 acknowledged: *"The pressure on schools to meet instructional demands is considerable, and calligraphy is therefore naturally pushed to the margins. Although weekly periods were initially scheduled, they were often canceled because of other subjects or*

examination-related activities. As a result, calligraphy could not function as a formal compulsory subject." This statement is consistent with the broader national pattern in which the nominal provision rate is close to 90%, whereas the proportion of schools that actually offer standardized calligraphy courses is considerably lower. Calligraphy education is provided exclusively through after-school services or clubs, rather than being incorporated into the formal curriculum, and the prescribed instructional hours are not strictly observed.

Responses from local government officials provide an administrative explanation for this attenuation. G1 stated: *"What the local government can do is formulate norms and standards and strengthen coordination among schools, educational institutions, and families. However, the fundamental problem is not that the policies are inadequate. Rather, grassroots schools lack the capacity to implement them, as well as professional systems and reliable financial support mechanisms. In addition to urban schools, we are also responsible for a large number of rural schools. Even the provision of basic subjects is difficult in some areas, let alone calligraphy education."* G2 added: *"We implement whatever policies are issued by higher authorities, and we have limited discretion to take the lead in substantially enhancing the influence of calligraphy education. At most, we can organize forms of urban-rural assistance, such as sending teachers to rural areas to provide public-interest classes. However, these efforts are insufficient to address the problem as a whole."* These responses suggest that the limited implementation of calligraphy education policies by local governments should not simply be interpreted as a lack of administrative commitment. Rather, local authorities face the dual constraints of limited resources and restricted institutional authority. Their selective implementation of policy is therefore a rational response to structural and institutional constraints, rather than an expression of deliberate administrative neglect.

4.2 The Second Gap: Structural Fracture in Teacher Staffing

If the first major gap is the "soft attenuation" of policy transmission, the shortage of qualified teachers constitutes the "hard bottleneck" constraining the implementation of calligraphy education. T2 and T4 acknowledged the limitations of the professional preparation: *"We are not trained as calligraphy specialists, so we can only teach basic skills, such as writing with pencils and pens. We ourselves do not understand aesthetic education or the cultural inheritance associated with calligraphy. How, then, can we teach these aspects to students?"* This observation reflects a situation commonly found in primary and secondary schools in China. When more than 70% of calligraphy instruction is undertaken by teachers without professional training in calligraphy, higher-level objectives specified in policy documents, such as cultivating students' aesthetic sensibilities and developing their understanding of the cultural connotations of calligraphy, lack an adequate group of qualified implementers. Consequently, these objectives are often reduced to the most basic requirement of maintaining correct writing posture.

T3 also described, based on his own experience, the mismatch between the supply of qualified teachers and the demand for them, which is generated by the staffing sys-

tem: *"I have the necessary professional competence, but without a secure staffing position, I cannot remain in the school. Temporary and substitute teaching has become the norm, making it impossible to establish a stable and sustainable teaching team. Schools also want professionally trained teachers, but the number of available staffing positions is very limited, and priority is given to Chinese, Mathematics, and English."* The central implication of this account is not that professionally trained calligraphy teachers are absent, but that the existing rules governing the allocation of staffing positions make it difficult for them to enter the basic education system. On the one hand, graduates of calligraphy programs at normal universities encounter difficulties in obtaining teaching positions in public schools. On the other hand, primary and secondary schools have an urgent need for professionally trained calligraphy teachers but are unable to recruit sufficient numbers of them. Supply and demand therefore remain disconnected on opposite sides of the staffing barrier.

Schools have attempted to respond to this dilemma through internal capacity building. However, T1 interviewed for this study explained: *"We also want to provide professional development for teachers, but funding is limited, and calligraphy is not included as an assessment indicator. Since higher-level authorities have not established mandatory requirements in this regard, it is difficult for us to allocate funding for such training."* This response reveals another institutional paradox. Improving the quality of the teaching workforce requires funding and professional development. However, securing such funding depends on the inclusion of calligraphy education in mandatory assessment systems, while the effective inclusion of calligraphy in these systems presupposes the availability of qualified teachers. In the absence of a strong external incentive, this paradox is difficult to resolve at the grassroots level. Consequently, the development of the calligraphy teaching workforce has remained stagnant for an extended period, characterized by part-time and substitute teaching, together with repetitive instruction at a relatively basic level.

4.3 The Third Gap: The Alienation of Aesthetic Education under Parents' Utilitarian Demands and the Market's Profit Orientation

The first two gaps arise within the policy implementation system, whereas the third results from the "reverse shaping" of the education system by external forces. The findings indicate that parents' understanding of calligraphy education and the supply logic of the extracurricular training market mutually reinforce one another. Together, they form a value cycle centered on examination-oriented performance improvement and the rapid acquisition of certificates, thereby marginalizing the original aesthetic and cultural objectives of calligraphy education.

The views expressed by the three parents interviewed in this study are highly consistent. P1 stated: *"We mainly let our child learn calligraphy so that the handwriting will be neat and the child will not lose marks in examinations. We have not thought much about cultural inheritance or artistic influence."* P2 expressed a more direct preference: *"We value quick results. Ideally, my child should pass an examination and obtain a certificate."* P3 described a pragmatic motivation related to time management: *"Sending our child to calligraphy classes on weekends is also convenient for us. It is*

similar to having someone supervise the child for two hours. We do not object if calligraphy classes are provided at school, but if the results are only average, we are still willing to pay for external classes." The statements of these three parents show that their demands for calligraphy education are concentrated primarily on three instrumental dimensions: the improvement of handwriting, the acquisition of certificates, and the convenience of childcare arrangements.

Parents' utilitarian demands directly shape the form of provision adopted by the off-campus calligraphy training market. Drawing on observations of extracurricular training institutions, T5 explained that off-campus institutions specifically cater to parents' demands. They use formulaic teaching methods that focus primarily on repeated practice and the coloring of model characters, allowing them to display immediate "results" to parents. The two sides reinforce each other, and utilitarianism is becoming increasingly pronounced. Everyone is focused on improving scores and obtaining certificates, while no one pays sufficient attention to the cultural inheritance and aesthetic education associated with calligraphy. Schools would like to provide literacy-oriented instruction, but they lack both the motivation and the institutional space to do so. This observation reveals an important systemic mechanism. The profit-oriented logic of the market tends to encourage training institutions to provide products that parents want rather than forms of education that students may need. When parents generally pursue rapid improvement and certification, training institutions respond by mass-producing standardized templates and examination-oriented training programs. These practices, in turn, reinforce parents' utilitarian expectations and produce a mutually reinforcing cycle.

T1 further described the other side of this conflict from the perspective of family-school relations: *"Many parents believe that if their children attend calligraphy classes at school, the results should be immediate and their handwriting should improve quickly. However, they overlook the need to consolidate writing habits through long-term daily practice. This parental mentality conflicts with the educational philosophy that we originally intended to promote and can even generate disagreements."* This account highlights the most concerning consequence of the third gap. Parents' utilitarian expectations not only fail to generate constructive pressure for schools, but also place schools in a dilemma between adhering to a literacy-oriented approach and meeting parents' demands for rapid results. In the absence of clear policy support and appropriate evaluation guidance, most schools ultimately compromise with parental expectations or lower the requirements for calligraphy instruction. As a result, the policy objective of using calligraphy as a means of fostering students' overall development is reduced to a formal expression rather than being substantively realized.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

This paper takes Lvliang City as a case study and examines the implementation of national calligraphy education policies at the local level through policy document analysis and semi-structured interviews with ten grassroots education administrator, calligraphy teachers, parents, and government officials. The findings indicate that, although an increasingly comprehensive policy system has been established at the national level, a

significant gap remains between policy objectives and implementation outcomes in third-tier cities in China. This gap is manifested in the gradual weakening of policy transmission, structural deficiencies in teacher staffing, and the triple dilemma generated by parents' utilitarian demands and the dual pressures exerted by the off-campus training market on the space available for school-based aesthetic education.

These findings reveal the underlying logic behind the difficulties encountered in implementing calligraphy education policies. With regard to the theoretical implications for policy implementation, this case study demonstrates that the four elements emphasized by the Smith model, namely the idealized policy, implementing organization, target group, and environmental factors, do not constitute static and mutually adaptive relationships [5]. Rather, they form a dynamic field of tension within specific local contexts. The greater the degree of idealization in policy texts, the greater the demands placed on the resources of implementing agencies, the recognition and participation of target groups, and the adequacy of the surrounding environment. In resource-constrained areas such as third-tier cities in central and western China, idealized policies are particularly susceptible to systematic erosion at the implementation level. This finding contributes to a further understanding of the applicability of policy implementation theory in the Chinese context. Specifically, policy attenuation is not merely the result of information distortion or insufficient implementation willingness. It is also an inevitable consequence of the structural mismatch between the implementation conditions presupposed by policy design and local realities.

From the perspective of governance practice, the coexistence of these three gaps points to a broader problem that extends beyond the field of calligraphy education itself. The distinctive difficulty of aesthetic education policies lies in the duality of their policy objectives. Calligraphy education not only serves the instrumental function of standardizing writing practice, but also performs the functions of aesthetic development and cultural inheritance. However, when these two types of objectives are conveyed to the grassroots level without adequate institutional guarantees, instrumental objectives tend to be retained because of their direct connection with examination-related needs, whereas aesthetic and cultural objectives are systematically marginalized because they are difficult to quantify and assess. This finding suggests that any public policy aimed at promoting literacy-oriented educational reform will inevitably be filtered and reinterpreted at the grassroots level through examination-oriented logic if it fails to provide substantive institutional protection for educational objectives that are difficult to quantify within evaluation systems and resource-allocation mechanisms. On this basis, the article proposes three pathways for policy improvement. First, at the level of teacher provision, a dedicated staffing system should be introduced to create accessible recruitment channels for professionally trained personnel. Second, at the level of evaluation, a comprehensive system integrating both educational process and student competency should be developed to encourage changes in parents' perceptions. Third, at the level of market regulation, a tiered supervision system for off-campus training institutions should be established to curb the rapid expansion of profit-driven educational provision.

The study also has several limitations. Regarding case selection, it focuses exclusively on Lvliang City, a third-tier city in Shanxi Province, China. Further comparative

research is therefore needed to determine whether the findings can be extended to the eastern coastal regions or to more remote rural areas. Regarding research design, this study relies on cross-sectional data and does not longitudinally track developments in the same region before and after policy interventions. Consequently, it does not provide a systematic account of the dynamic process through which policies are adjusted and implemented over time. Future research could conduct comparative studies involving multiple cases from eastern, central, and western regions. It could also incorporate quantitative methods, such as questionnaire surveys, to measure the effectiveness of policy implementation more systematically. Where feasible, longitudinal research designs could be adopted to examine the practical effects of policy adjustments over time. Despite these limitations, the central conclusion of this study remains clear. The vitality of public policy depends on its implementation, while the quality of implementation depends on whether the institutional design of the implementation system adequately recognizes the practical constraints faced by grassroots actors and the diverse demands of multiple stakeholders.

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