On Vocational Education in China and Its Development Strategies

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Abstract. Compared with other educations, vocational education focuses on development of students' practical skills. It plays a significant role in optimizing educational structure and boosting employment. Based on analysis of its current situations, the paper tries to come up with suggestions concerning problems and difficulties facing China's vocational education, so as to contribute to its fruitful reform and sound development.

Introduction

China's education is human-centric, whose ultimate goal is all-around growth of its citizens and satisfaction of social needs. According to Report on the Development of Vocational Education in China (2002—2012), The employment rates of secondary vocational school and tertiary vocational schools respectively exceed 95% and 87% in 6 consecutive years. The development of vocational education, which focuses on students' practical skills, is significant in optimization of educational structure and promotion of students' competence in job market.

National Outline for Medium-and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020) states that vocational education is a primary way to spur economic development, boost employment, improve living standards, and resolve the three rural issues (farmers, agriculture and rural areas). It’s also a key link in regulating the imbalance of labor supply and demand. The target as of 2020 is to establish the system of modern vocational education, which adapts to economic transformation, meets needs of economic reconstruction, embodies the notion of lifelong education, and sees the coordinated development of second and tertiary vocational educations. By analyzing current situations, the paper attempts to give constructive suggestions on effective reform and sound development of China's vocational education.

Definition and Significance of Vocational Education

Vocational education is the education of vocational knowledge and skills in a particular trade or occupation, as well as professional ethics. It is one of the four major education forms, along with primary education, higher education and adult education. Compared with other educations, it focuses on development of practical skills and is aimed at cultivating laborers with certain professional knowledge and skills. Vocational education has the following features: (1) Flexibility. It adapts actively to the needs of economic development by transforming from the school-dominated single mode to a mixed mode involving schools, enterprises, institutions, and individual citizens. (2) Medium. It serves as a bridge between personal growth, social development, education and occupations. (3) Practicability, as is shown in the high employment rate among vocational school graduates.

Vocational education suits people's needs and meets the demands of economy for high-quality laborers and skilled workers. It plays a significant role in spurring economic growth, boosting employment, improving living standards, and solving the three rural issues. Therefore, the development of vocational education is the focus of China's education reform.
Advantages and Achievements of Current Vocational Education

After decades of development, vocational education in China has accumulated its advantages and formed its own educational modes. The advantages are mature training system, less schooling time, and more financial returns. Its unique educational mode is "skills + diploma + employment". Report on the Development of Vocational Education in China (2002—2012) sums up five of its major achievements in the decade: (1) Establishment of the world's largest vocational education system. As of 2011, the enrollment in China's secondary and tertiary vocational schools reached a total number of more than 30 million students, and more than 60 million people took part in training provided by vocational schools or vocational training institutions. (2) Establishment of a fairly complete legal system of vocational education based on Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China, supplemented by Education Law of the PRC, Labor Law of the PRC, as well as administrative regulations and local laws. (3) Flexible school-running patterns involving enterprises and trade organizations. (4) Extensive student aid system. (5) In general, the development of vocational education with Chinese characteristics.

Other specific achievements include: (1) Promoting economic development. In the past decade there have been 7.265 graduates from vocational schools of different levels. Vocational education contributes 21% of the increase in average schooling of labor force. (2) Boosting employment. The employment rate of secondary vocational school graduates has been above 95% in six consecutive years. In 2011, 80.86% of them enjoy the right of labor insurance, and 55.2% earn a starting salary higher than ¥1500. As for graduates from tertiary vocational schools, the employment rate averages 87.6% in the last three years, and their average monthly earnings are ¥2171.3. Both the employment rate and salaries are still rising steadily. (3) Promoting social equity. 90% of secondary vocational school students and 20% of the tertiary students enjoy state aid. Starting from 2009, students from economically disadvantaged families and agriculture-related majors have gradually been exempted from tuition. (4) Optimizing educational structure. Secondary vocational schools account for 48.89% of secondary education enrollment, while tertiary vocational schools constitute 47.67% of the enrollment in education on tertiary level, which greatly facilitate universal access to high school education and popularization of higher education. (5) Serving farmers, agriculture and rural areas. During the 11th five-year plan period, various levels of vocational education provide job training for 185 million farm laborers looking for urban employment. (6) Helping local development. More than 60% of vocational school graduates find jobs in local areas. (7) Passing on traditional culture. Over 50 majors on folk art and craft have been set up to train inheritors of traditional minority and folk cultures.

Challenges and Difficulties Facing China's Vocational Education

Despite remarkable accomplishments, vocational education in China is faced with increasing challenges: Economic transformation raises new and higher requirements for vocational education; Technology and occupational transformations triggered by biotechnology have direct impact on it; Aging population requires vocational education to take up the mission of renewed human resources exploitation; The demand of lifelong education poses challenges to the forms, approaches, scopes, content and objectives of vocational education; Rural constructions are in urgent need of new educated farmers with skill and management knowledge, which are up to vocational education to provide.

Facing the demands and challenges, current China's vocational education have to correct the defects in its ideas, systems, policies and management.

Awareness has to be raised of building training bases. More emphasis should be placed on the establishment of training bases, by studying more about it, and forming coordinated working mechanism among relevant government departments, enterprises and vocational schools. The lagging establishment of training bases should be improved with unified planning. And some leading bases can be built to play an exemplary role.
Due to lack of funds, operation of training bases encounters many difficulties. Discrepancy between funds and demands results in many problems in vocational schools' existing training bases: Lagging constructions, slow update of equipment, and huge pressure on the investment, operation and maintenance of their facilities; Scarce resources outside campus and unbalanced development between different majors.

Deficient management mechanism makes it harder to have enterprise-school collaboration. Without unified regulations on the collaboration, there's unclear accountability on the part of government, enterprises and schools. Lack of communication, cooperation, and specialized government departments to coordinate and supervise it, has a detrimental effect on the in-depth cooperation between enterprises and vocational schools. The training mode of work-integrated learning, school-enterprise cooperation and internship requires improvement. Meanwhile, insufficient preferential policies and high training cost, combined with high risk of workplace injuries dampen enterprises' motivation to collaborate. Furthermore, ordered training sometimes ends in formality, and practices are inadequate in joint teaching and jointly developed courses.

Lack of pertinence in school teaching and standard in vocational training. Absence of unified planning leads to repeated majors and investments, and waste of resources: (1) Teaching divorced from the market contributes to unsustainable funds and unfruitful training. (2) The tradition of schools prioritizing theory over practice accounts for staggering training levels. (3) Vocational education in traditional areas such as gardening, cuisine, marketing, tourism and computer application, where training classes make up more than 60% of the total class hour, can mostly satisfy social needs. However, in some emerging majors like rail transit control, automobile maintenance, numerical control and property management, the percentage of 20%—30% is far from desirable.

Vocational education suffers the shortage of faculty, especially double-qualified teachers who are qualified both in theory and in practical skills. The quantity, structure and management of vocational school teachers fail to meet the needs of teaching. Shortage of dual-qualified teachers has become the bottleneck in vocational education development. As a result of inadequate training and recruitment, the Faculty-Student Ratio in vocational schools is far below national standard.

Development Strategies of China's Vocational Education

The principles and guidelines of vocational education, as is stated in the Report on the development of Vocational Education in China (2002—2012), are employment-oriented and student-centric, with development of practical skills at its core and professional ethics as an indispensable part.

Rapid economic growth raises higher requirements for quantity of skilled workers and quality of vocational education. The improvement of students' practical skills and comprehensive professional capacity is critical to the reconstruction, optimization and update of China's economy and industries. The discussion of Development strategies of China's vocational education comes down to two factors:

Awareness of Vocational Education

(1) Develop vocational education to improve labor force quality. Educational institutions, employers and youth used to blindly pursue college diploma and ignore vocational education. With the reform of and progress, now the social trend is changing. Vocational education is the effective supplement to higher education and important approach to educational diversity.

(2) Improving labor force quality boosts employment rate. Without entering colleges, secondary school graduates have the option to be admitted into tertiary vocational schools to learn practical skills and become core technicians in various fields. Without finding jobs, college graduates can be offered vocational training to expand their professional knowledge and apply theory to practice. In this way, vocational education is improving laborers' all-around quality as well as boosting employment.
(3) Improving labor force quality facilitates new industrialization. It has become a consensus that China's new industrialization should be based on technology advance and high-quality laborers. The attraction of high-level overseas talents and cultivation of large numbers of technicians are both essential to a reasonable human resources structure. (4) Transformation of labor force helps rural areas. The priority of future vocational education is involving more students from rural areas and enable them to find jobs with professional skills. In addition, more financial aids and tuition exemption should be available to attract rural students and agriculture-related majors.

**Policies on Vocational Education**

(1) Increase public supervision of governments on municipal and county levels. Make unified plans and reasonable arrangements to make step-by-step progress based on local conditions while trying to avoid repetitive investments and constructions. Municipal governments sold issue relevant guidelines for government departments and teaching institutions to follow. Comprehensive study of vocational education should be conducted, including its current situations, ideas, modes, educational reforms and relevant policies.

(2) Integration of school, enterprise and social resources helps establish high-quality training bases and eventually build training networks. Policies should be made encouraging relevant trade organizations and enterprises to be involved in operations of vocational schools in terms of faculties, teaching buildings, training bases, equipment and technical support: Subsidies and tax exemption can be offered to enterprises to serve as motivations in their collaboration with vocational schools. Enterprise-school cooperation modes should explored to incorporate their advantages in a win-win situation. In-depth interaction and collaboration among trade organizations, enterprises and vocational schools contribute to coordinated training bases and sustainable faculty sources. Encouraging policies are needed to promote establishment of dual-qualified faculty.

**References**
