University Transfer: A New Curricular Function in Secondary Vocational Schools in China

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Abstract. Responding to the statement that it is for university transfer that some Chinese students travel to further their studies in American community colleges, this paper argues that actually university transfer has already been under experiment in most secondary vocational schools of China. Taking Shanghai Technician School as an example, this paper introduces the academic transfer under experiment in China. Finally, a few transfer policy recommendations are put forward to give more students more opportunities to transfer to more universities.

Introduction
For a few years, some Chinese students have been to the United States to further their studies in community colleges. Why? C. Frolick in 2011 argued: “These students’ opportunities in accessing college in China are quite limited [1].” In the same year Hennock also argued that there is little possibility of students transferring to university after vocational education [2]. It was a fact that hardly was there any possibility for vocational students to transfer to universities following graduation in China. However, recently great changes have taken place in vocational education, especially in the large cities in China. Do students in Secondary vocational schools have to accept the destiny that their formal schooling education comes to an end at an early age? Do they still have no choice but to go to work following graduation?

Attempting to answer these questions, this paper reviews the concerned research of university transfer both in America and China. Taking Shanghai Technician School as an example, this paper introduces the university transfer under experiment in China. Finally, a few policy recommendations are put forward to give more students more opportunities to transfer to more universities.

Literature Review
Dating from the early years of the twentieth century, university transfer, also called college transfer, has been playing an important role in American vocational education. It is the university transfer that offers opportunities to the great numbers of students who see the community college as a stepping-stone to higher learning. In 1960, Thornton wrote that transfer “is still the function on which the junior colleges expend most effort and in which most of their students express interest [3].” University transfer was first developed in North America, and remain further advanced and in more extensive use there than elsewhere [4]. Rubi in 1994 wrote that “twenty-two states had policies regarding associate degree transfer: thirteen mandated by state boards, four mandated by legislatures, and five voluntary [5]”. Actually much research has been done on the academic transfer in America. Some are on transfer function, others on transferability; still others are on its instructional practices [8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14].

Yes. Hardly was there any possibility for secondary vocational students to transfer to universities following graduation in China. In secondary vocational colleges of China, university transfer is just under experiment and little research is done, let alone papers published in English. Hence, it is not weird that fewer American experts know much about the university transfer in China.
University Transfer of Chinese Vocational Education

Dating back to its early years, vocational education system was the key to the Chinese construction of the socialist country and economy. Except during the Culture Revolution when most schools were closed down, vocational education helped satisfy the needs of the national economic development in China. However, it held true that vocational education did indicate an end period of formal education for students in China, as can be seen in Germany.

Recently, with the rapid transformation from a trade and investment-driven model to one of innovation and consumption in China, the demands for senior technicians inevitably rise, especially in big cities such as Shanghai. As the vocational education is closely related to the cultivation of senior technicians, it is held that vocational education can in part solve the problem of the discrepancy between market demand and supply of senior technicians. Hence, under the support of Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, many secondary vocational schools have been reformed.

New University Transfer Programs in Shanghai Technician School

Shanghai Technician School (STS) is one of them. Founded in 1951, STS used to enroll junior middle school students who would be screened out in the competition to reach university level. Run by the National Bureau of Labor in China, it was very closely linked to its state-owned enterprises through guaranteed employment [15]. With more and more collectives and private enterprises, there was a tendency of the reduction of student enrollment.

In order to better meet Shanghai’s needs of senior technicians and solve the problem of the reduction of student enrollment, in 1988, STS, together with Shanghai University of Engineering Science (SUES), a four-year university enrolling senior middle school students and providing bachelor’s and master’s degree, co-founded Higher Vocational-Technical School of SUES (HVTS). HVTS enrolled senior middle school students and offered three-year higher vocational-technical education. Soon, STS, together with SUES and its HVTS, began to experiment with more new programs. One program in a 3+2 fashion (three-year secondary vocational education and two-year higher vocational-technical education) was launched in 2013. Under this new program, graduates from STS could choose to go on taking higher vocational-technical courses in HVTS and gain certificates. The other program in a 3+4 fashion (three-year secondary vocational education and four-year undergraduate education) was launched in 2015. Under the program, graduates of STS, instead of immediately entering the job market, could choose to go on taking undergraduate courses in SUES and gain bachelor’s degrees. It has been scheduled by some educational experts that graduates from STS even can choose to go on taking graduate courses and gain vocational master’s degrees. Hence, STS, affiliated to SUES, will provide with programs for graduates, undergraduates, higher vo-tech students, and secondary technician students. STS has taken a giant leap by enabling vocational students to transfer to academic education.

Challenges and Recommendations

STS, SUES and its HVTS share the campus, the teaching faculty and stuff, which paves a much more smooth way for secondary vocational students to university transfer. No other transfer is more convenient than the one done in one campus. But to enlarge enrollment to a greater extent, STS will eventually face some challenges, such as the limited target university, transfer specialty, and transfer time. The key challenge is that transfer programs are limited to just a single university. This kind of transfer is convenient and easy to carry on for a short time. But in the long run, it is likely to limit students’ right to transfer to any program in any university at any time.

Therefore, to better reform the vocational education, limits as few as possible should be placed on the target university, the transfer time, and transfer program. Students should not be deprived of the right to choose their favorite program in their favorite university at any time suitable for them.
Conclusion

In spite of the inflexibility of academic transfer in China's vocational education, it is really on the way to providing an upward movement to reach university level. Students don't have to accept the destiny that their education comes to an end at an early age. As more and more students choose to go to STS, there is a dramatic increase in the student enrollment these years. It is the same case in any other secondary vocational schools under the similar programs in China. If China goes on to experiment new programs and better its vocational education, hopefully fewer and fewer Chinese students will have to travel abroad to transfer to the universities.

References


