

# Study on the Trajectory of the Integrated Development of Vocational Education and Lifelong Education

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**Abstract:** In the face of new challenges and opportunities in China's vocational education development, it is imperative to firmly establish the concept of lifelong learning in order to meet the demands of social and economic progress. This paper conducts a comprehensive analysis of the existing issues in vocational education and lifelong learning, identifies their root causes, draws upon successful experiences from developed countries in integrating lifelong vocational education, proposes a novel mechanism for merging vocational education with lifelong learning, and presents a fresh approach towards aligning vocational education with lifelong learning. These efforts aim to provide innovative insights for advancing higher vocational education in our country and elevating its standards.

**Key words:** Vocational Education; Lifelong Learning; Integration Path; Mechanism; Successful Experiences

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of science and technology and the continuous upgrading of industrial structure, the significance of vocational education has become increasingly prominent. In the new era, the development of vocational education should closely align with national strategies and prioritize the training of high-quality laborers and skilled talents. The concept of lifelong education presents a fresh opportunity for advancing vocational education. The integrated development of vocational education and lifelong education in this new era is a crucial measure to comprehensively enhance the quality of Chinese laborers, address structural imbalances between supply and demand for highly skilled talents in China, improve entrepreneurship and employment outcomes, as well as promote the construction of

high-skilled human resources [1]. These reforms also recognized their role in human resource development. By analyzing our province's and city's current situation regarding vocational education and lifelong learning, this project aims to identify existing issues along with their underlying causes. Drawing insights from experiences in developed countries, we will establish a novel mechanism for integrating vocational education into lifelong learning. This endeavor will pave a new path for higher vocational education within our country.

## 2. Related Concepts and the Necessity of Integrated Development

### 2.1 The Concept of Vocational Education and Lifelong Education

Vocational education refers to educational activities that enable educatees to have comprehensive qualities such as professional ethics, scientific culture, professional knowledge, and technical skills required for engaging in a certain occupation or professional development, including vocational school education and vocational training [2]. Vocational education is the product of social development and the development of human civilization, which can further promote the development of social productive forces and promote the adjustment and transformation of industrial structure.

"Lifelong learning", as we often say, is "never too old to learn", which refers to the continuous learning process that every member of the society carries out throughout a person's life in order to meet the needs of social development and individual development [3]. This concept is strongly advocated and popularized by UNESCO and other relevant international institutions, and gradually reached a consensus around the world after the first World Conference on Lifelong Learning. The concept of "lifelong

learning" is an extremely important factor for the development of individuals and for the development of all mankind, and is the key to the sustainable development of all mankind. At present, lifelong education has become the main basis for many countries to formulate educational policies and policies, and is an important embodiment of human development and progress [4].

## **2.2 The Relationship between Vocational Education and Lifelong Education**

As an important part of the education system, vocational education plays an important role in the economic and social development, and is an important support for individuals to realize lifelong learning and sustainable development. The integrated development of vocational education and lifelong education is an important topic for current and future research on vocational education and lifelong education [5].

Vocational education is an integral part of lifelong education. Lifelong education is the sum of all kinds of education received by people throughout their lives. It advocates providing necessary knowledge and skills in the best way at the moment when everyone needs it. Vocational education is an organic part of lifelong education [6]. The current vocational education includes vocational education and technical education, and more training is the implementation of talents in the production line. With the rapid development of the economy, the career of individuals in the long life has become no longer single, there are more possibilities. When facing a new and unfamiliar occupation, vocational training becomes an important springboard, so that individuals can have a preliminary adaptation process to the upcoming unfamiliar occupation. Therefore, the time limit of vocational training and vocational education will become longer and longer, which will break through the traditional school vocational education.

The connotation of vocational education and lifelong education is consistent. Vocational education should not only cultivate people's practical skills in all aspects, but also cultivate people's professional ethics, and educate people how to be a qualified professional, including love, dedication and social responsibility. Vocational education is also advancing with The Times, on the one hand to

meet the needs of society, on the other hand to highlight personalized, which is consistent with the connotation of lifelong education, the connotation of lifelong education is to serve both the lifelong all-round development of people and the sustainable development of society. The goal of both lifelong education and vocational education is to promote the full development of human potential in all aspects so as to promote the comprehensive development of human and society [7].

## **2.3 The Necessity of Integrated Development of Vocational Education and Lifelong Education**

2.3.1. Inevitable requirement for the development and progress of human society today

Vocational education objectively satisfies the employment needs of individuals and the objective needs of jobs, and is a survival and development skill for individuals in the society. From the perspective of individual life cycle, different stages will encounter different career bottlenecks, and how to break through the bottleneck requires individuals to maintain the motivation of continuous learning. Vocational education provides learning channels for individuals, enabling them to master the necessary knowledge and skills. Lifelong learning provides individuals with a sustainable learning state, enabling them to update and supplement the new knowledge and skills needed by the society at all times, so as to achieve the life goal of individual growth and sustainable development. For the whole society, only by maintaining the state of lifelong learning and building a learning society can we effectively promote the progress of human society. Therefore, the deep integration of vocational education and lifelong education is an inevitable requirement for the development and progress of human society at present [8].

2.3.2. Inevitable trend of our economic and social development

With the continuous development of China's economy and society, the demand for technical skills in all walks of life is increasingly increasing, and it is imperative to provide lifelong vocational skills training for vocational skills personnel in the new era. At the same time, with the rapid development of the Internet and artificial intelligence, it is

increasingly difficult for people to choose a career, and the knowledge and skills obtained only by school education will not be able to match new jobs. The traditional value concept of vocational education is increasingly unable to meet people's practical needs, and the era of lifelong occupation has long come to an end. The lifelong education of self-development and self-realization has become an important part of China's education system. Therefore, vocational education needs to re-examine its development position, vocational education can only integrate with lifelong education to promote the development of our economy better and faster, the integration of the two is also the inevitable trend of our social economic development.

### 2.3.3. The only way for the reform and development of vocational education.

From the perspective of talent training, vocational education uses more quantitative indicators in the training of students. In terms of the time limit of training, academic education is still the main education, with students obtaining graduation certificates as the dividing line, and these have short-term and phased nature. Lifelong education, on the other hand, focuses on the development of students' career and is long-term and lifelong. From the perspective of lifelong education, learning is continuous and lifelong, and students are free to choose learning content, regardless of their major or duration [9]. Therefore, vocational education in higher vocational colleges should gradually update the teaching ideas, teaching means, teaching methods and teaching content, so as to better adapt to the development trend of lifelong education.

### 3. The Present and Prospective Developmental Situation Both Domestically and Internationally

The vocational education systems in economically developed countries such as Germany, Australia, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and South Korea are all centered around lifelong learning and prioritize individuals. These systems offer flexible academic structures that allow for both full-time and part-time study [10]. In Germany and Switzerland's dual system, more than 40% of students are enrolled part-time in over 1,200 community colleges nationwide.

Students have the option to pursue sub-courses or non-credit courses either as full-time students or while working. This provides them with flexible learning schedules and credits that can be transferred to universities [10]. Recently, there has been a growing trend towards community colleges as a new form of higher education. Community colleges serve as an extension of lifelong education within higher education by effectively bridging general education courses with vocational education courses. Graduates who meet graduation requirements enter community college to acquire market-relevant skills. Some seek new careers (56%), others aim to develop skills for a second career or increase their income, update their existing careers and skills, enrich their personal knowledge base, or explore different fields before deciding on a career path [10].

In Europe today, there is a trend towards recognizing all forms of learning and experience under a lifelong learning system including formal, informal, and non-formal learning models. On the other hand, South Korea has established a non-formal educational model within its lifelong learning framework to provide those who missed out on initial formal schooling opportunities with a second chance at acquiring an education [10].

Vocational education is undergoing a profound transformation in our country. The core of the reform lies in transitioning vocational education from its traditional school-based approach to lifelong learning. This change reflects the advancement of our educational concept and fosters a more humanized and practical vocational education system. Humanization is demonstrated through respecting individual differences, prioritizing students' all-round development, and providing equal opportunities for everyone to pursue an education suitable for their own needs. Practicality is reflected in aligning educational content with real-world scenarios and cultivating talents equipped with practical skills and qualities that meet societal demands. Firstly, the gradual establishment of a lifelong learning system ensures that education becomes an integral part of people's lives. Compared to traditional models, lifelong learning emphasizes the humanistic nature of education, whole-person development,

recognizes individuals' agency in the learning process, and caters to diverse and personalized learning needs. This change not only enhances individuals' overall quality but also nurtures more skilled professionals with comprehensive abilities, laying a solid foundation for sustainable social-economic development while contributing to society's long-term progress. Lifelong learning empowers each individual to discover their unique path towards knowledge acquisition and personal growth while realizing their life's purpose.

Secondly, China's vocational education system boasts greater flexibility within its academic structure as well as diversified learning styles. This flexible design accommodates various societal demands for different vocational skills, on the other hand also to meet the needs of students personalized development. Students are allowed to choose full-time or part-time study according to their own needs and time arrangements, the proportion of part-time students is gradually increasing, the learning schedule is flexible, and the credit transfer system is allowed to realize the conversion of credits obtained by full-time students and part-time students in the learning process, which improves the learning enthusiasm of students in the vocational education system. It also provides students with more development opportunities and broadens their employment channels. At the same time, this flexible way of learning also helps students balance the relationship between study, work and life, adjust their learning progress independently, achieve personalized learning, and reduce learning pressure. This initiative will help improve students' enthusiasm for learning, train more high-quality talents with innovative spirit and practical ability, and contribute to the country's economic and social development.

Third, the recognition of learning under the lifelong learning system of vocational education in China. Our country is gradually recognizing all types of learning and experience, including formal, informal and informal learning, so that more people can achieve their own learning and development through different ways and means. This policy is conducive to arousing the enthusiasm of the whole people for learning and improving the quality of the people.

Fourth, the establishment of informal education model in our country. Drawing on international experience, our country is establishing a non-formal education model within the framework of lifelong learning to provide a second opportunity for those who missed the initial opportunity to learn in the formal school system and improve the level of education for all. This educational model helps to reduce educational inequities and enable more people to benefit from vocational education.

Finally, community colleges have become an important vehicle for lifelong education. As a new form of higher education, community college is a carrier for the extension of the idea of lifelong education in the field of higher education, and a bridge between the general education curriculum and the vocational education curriculum. According to the changes of social development and market demand, we cooperate with enterprises and industry associations to timely adjust the curriculum and teaching content and jointly develop courses and training programs to meet the specific needs of the industry and enterprises. It provides opportunities for graduates to learn the skills needed by the market, to find new careers, to update careers and skills, to enrich personal knowledge system and to explore different courses to determine careers, which effectively promotes the development of vocational education in China.

In the future, our country will continue to deepen the reform of vocational education, promote the development of vocational education, and contribute to the national economic development and personnel training.

#### **4. The Problems of Integration of Vocational Education and Lifelong Education in Our Country**

First, the concept of integrated development of vocational education and lifelong education is still lacking. Lifelong education emphasizes the necessity and importance of receiving vocational education and training in each stage of individual career, further enriches the form and content of running vocational colleges, and is the re-orientation and structural adjustment of vocational education in the new era. However, due to the late start of vocational education in China, although the

development concept of integrating vocational education into lifelong education is gradually accepted by the public, the concept of integrating lifelong education and vocational education has not yet formed a relatively complete system, so that it lacks sufficient scientific guidance in vocational education, and the contact between vocational colleges and the public is still insufficient. The integration of school-running content and industrial transformation and upgrading is not enough, and the integrated development of the two has not been well implemented and popularized in higher vocational colleges, which limits the integrated development of vocational education and lifelong education to a certain extent [1].

Second, the upward channel of vocational education is not smooth. At present, China's vocational education system still continues the academic education system, that is, secondary vocational (vocational high) and higher vocational (junior college). After the completion of higher vocational education, students can only turn to applied undergraduate to receive general higher education through the channel of upgrading, and vocational education stops at the junior college level, which makes vocational education and lifelong education basically in a state of disjunction. On the one hand, the space and opportunities for vocational education students to learn and improve are relatively limited, and students are severely hindered in receiving continuing education and lifelong education in the field of vocational education. On the other hand, the main channels for vocational education students to grow up are secondary vocational education, higher vocational education and general higher education, but there is a lack of good connection and integration among all levels of education. There is still a lack of effective overall design and penetration of talent training programs in various vocational education stages, and different education levels are not unified in talent training objectives and curriculum systems, which further limits the lifelong vocational education.

Third, supply and demand of vocational education is imbalance. Although Fuzhou vocational education has made great progress in scale and quality, there are still some

problems such as the imbalance between supply and demand and the disconnection between vocational education and industrial demand. The mismatch between the professional setting of vocational education and the demand of industrial transformation and upgrading in Fuzhou leads to the difficulty of graduates' employment. On the one hand, some majors are difficult to recruit students, and the employment rate of graduates is low; On the other hand, the demand of enterprises for high-quality skilled talents cannot be met, resulting in a prominent contradiction between supply and demand of talents.

Forth, the integration of vocational education and lifelong social training is not high. In our country, the current connection between vocational education and social training is not smooth, and the contribution of vocational education to social training is still insufficient. There are some obstacles such as the limited social service ability of vocational schools themselves, the obstructed mechanism of the connection between vocational schools and social training, and the asymmetry, imbalance and insufficiency of social training supply and demand. The lack of effective communication and cooperation mechanism between many vocational colleges and industry enterprises makes the social training services including enterprises in a state of separation and separation. There is a certain disconnection between the supply of vocational training in higher vocational colleges and the demand of social training in training content, training methods, training resources and other elements, which leads to the fact that enterprise employees cannot solve the skill problems existing in work after receiving vocational education and training, resulting in the loss of interest and enthusiasm for training and learning. It has affected the effect of lifelong vocational education and socialization. At the same time, the connection between the lifelong education system, family education and school education is not smooth enough, resulting in the waste of educational resources. The distribution of educational resources is uneven, and the gap between urban and rural areas and between regions is large. The curriculum is too traditional, lack of innovation; Learning places and facilities are limited, and it is difficult to meet the diverse learning needs of the public.

Five, there is still low participation in social resources. In the development process of vocational education and lifelong education, the policy support is still insufficient, and the participation of social resources is low, which limits the space for education development. The lack of investment in vocational education leads to the aging of school facilities and equipment, and it is difficult to improve the teaching quality. The policy system of lifelong education is not perfect, which restricts the development of lifelong education.

## **5. Countermeasures and Suggestions**

By referring to the experience of lifelong vocational education in developed countries, we should improve the laws and regulations of vocational education and lifelong education in our country, which provides a strong guarantee for integrated development. The government gives full support to vocational education and lifelong education in terms of finance and taxation to promote its rapid development. Attach importance to the cooperation between schools and enterprises, and realize the close connection between vocational education and industrial needs by jointly building training bases and carrying out industry-university-research projects. We will establish a sound lifelong learning system and promote the integrated development of vocational education and lifelong education.

### **5.1 Establish a Curriculum System That Matches Social Needs**

The integration of vocational education needs to establish a curriculum system that matches the needs of society. The system should keep pace with economic and social changes, scientific and reasonable professional Settings, and meet the needs of personnel training. At the same time, it is also necessary to strengthen the correlation and cohesion between disciplines, and establish a more flexible and diversified curriculum system to meet the needs of different individuals.

### **5.2 Strengthen the Link between Vocational Education and Industrial Demand**

To build a good bridge between vocational education and industrial needs, through school-enterprise cooperation to develop vocational courses, provide internship and practice opportunities, so that students can

better understand the actual needs of the industry, better master the core skills of the industry, improve professional quality, but also explore the potential needs of enterprises, improve the technical and management level of enterprises.

### **5.3 Diversified Teaching Incorporating Multiple Educational Models**

Vocational education should integrate more teaching modes and multimedia application, including Internet education, practical education, internship training, and so on, rather than limited to traditional classroom education. Moreover, when students are facing different stages and learning needs, they can be provided with more matching training methods and education models. Diversified education can not only better meet the needs of different individuals, but also maintain the flexibility and diversity of vocational education and training.

### **5.4 Establish a Mechanism for the Integrated Development of Vocational Education and Lifelong Education**

Establish a relatively perfect mechanism for the integration and development of vocational education and lifelong education, so as to better train talents in the field of vocational education and connect it with lifelong learning. This mechanism is not only applicable to the training of high-level talents, but also applicable to the re-learning and re-training of vocational skills talents, and cross-industry transformation talents. At the same time, vocational education certificates at different levels should be established to allow individuals to be certified in the training process and provide support for their career development.

### **5.5 Deepening and Expanding International Cooperation and Exchanges**

Establish an international cooperation mechanism for vocational education, actively establish long-term and stable vocational education cooperation relations with countries, carry out international cooperation projects, and share high-quality educational resources by signing vocational education cooperation agreements and establishing cooperation platforms and mechanisms to enhance the internationalization level of vocational

education. Actively participate in international vocational education projects, such as Worldskills Competition, to share experience with other countries, learn advanced ideas, and improve the overall level of vocational education in our country. To carry out exchanges of vocational education teachers, teachers are the key to the quality of education, increase international exchanges of vocational education teachers, carry out teacher training, teaching seminars and other activities, introduce international advanced educational concepts and methods, and improve the level of vocational education teachers. Promote student exchange and cooperation, encourage students to study abroad, improve students' international vision and cross-cultural communication skills. At the same time, we will attract more international students to receive vocational education in our country and enhance the international influence of our vocational education.

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