

Theoretical Interpretation and Construction of an Institutional Guarantee System for the Typological Positioning of Vocational Education

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Abstract: As a distinct educational type operating in parallel with general education and holding equal importance, clarifying the typological positioning of vocational education is a core prerequisite for the reform and development of vocational education in China, as well as a crucial measure for perfecting the modern education system. Based on typological thinking, this paper elucidates the core connotations and theoretical foundations of the typological positioning of vocational education, analyzes the existing shortcomings in the institutional framework supporting this positioning in China, and integrates the practical development of vocational education to construct an institutional guarantee system that aligns with the typological attributes of vocational education. This system is developed across dimensions including legal safeguards, institutional frameworks for provision, faculty development, evaluation systems, and industry–education integration. The aim is to provide theoretical support and practical pathways for promoting the high–quality development of vocational education and manifesting its typological value.

Keywords: Vocational Education; Typological Positioning; Theoretical Interpretation; Institutional Guarantee; Industry–Education Integration

0. Introduction

The *National Implementation Plan for Vocational Education Reform* (2019) formally established the core assertion that “vocational education and general education are two distinct types of education, holding equal importance.” The revised *Vocational Education Law of the People’s Republic of China* (2022) further solidified this positioning, marking a new stage of typological development for China’s vocational education. For a long time, vocational education in China was misinterpreted as a supplement to or a hierarchical extension of general education, leading to numerous challenges in its operational models, resource allocation, and social recognition, thereby constraining the full realization of its educational function. Against the backdrop of manufacturing transformation and upgrading and the construction of a skilled society, clarifying the typological attributes of vocational education and constructing a comprehensive institutional guarantee system to address the difficulties in implementing this typological positioning can not only enhance the quality and effectiveness of vocational education itself but also supply high–quality technical and skilled talents for China’s industrial development, contributing to the construction of an education powerhouse and a strong human resources nation. Deeply interpreting the theoretical connotations of the typological positioning of vocational education and exploring compatible institutional guarantee pathways have become important research topics in current vocational education studies.

1. Theoretical Interpretation of the Typological Positioning of Vocational Education

1.1 Core Connotation

The typological positioning of vocational education fundamentally entails clarifying its essential attributes as an independent educational type. Distinguished from general education’s focus on knowledge transmission and the cultivation of academic literacy, vocational education centers on the inheritance of technical skills and the development of vocational competencies. It focuses

on industrial demands and job alignment, constructing an educational model characterized by vocationality, practicality, and comprehensiveness. Its connotation encompasses three levels: First, Equality of Status: There is no hierarchical distinction between vocational education and general education; they differ only in their educational objectives and cultivation pathways. Both operate in parallel to support the modern education system, meeting the diverse talent needs of society and the varied development aspirations of individuals. Second, Specificity of Function: Oriented towards serving industrial development, vocational education bridges occupational positions with education and teaching, achieving the integration of “knowledge and action, work and study.” It undertakes the crucial functions of cultivating technical and skilled talents, promoting employment and entrepreneurship, and driving industrial upgrading. Third, Independence of the System: Vocational education should establish a complete, articulated system spanning from secondary to higher levels, forming its own unique standards for provision, curriculum systems, and evaluation mechanisms, thereby freeing itself from dependency on the general education system.

1.2 Theoretical Foundations

1.2.1 Human Capital Theory

Schultz's Human Capital Theory posits that human capital is the core driver of economic growth, and education is a vital pathway for human capital accumulation. As an educational type specifically aimed at cultivating technical and skilled human capital, vocational education enhances workers' vocational abilities and employability through focused skill training in specific occupational fields, achieving precise accumulation of human capital. This aligns with the demand for skilled human capital in industrial development, providing an economic theoretical foundation for the typological positioning of vocational education.

1.2.2 Educational Classification Theory

From the historical and logical perspectives of educational development, vocational education is an inevitable product of the evolution of human productive labor. The earliest human educational activities were essentially the transmission of vocational skills. With the division between mental and manual labor, two major educational types gradually formed: general education centered on understanding the world and vocational education centered on transforming the world. UNESCO's *International Standard Classification of Education* also confirms the independent typological status of vocational education, providing international consensus and classificatory theoretical basis for China's typological positioning of vocational education.

2. Institutional Dilemmas in the Typological Positioning of Vocational Education in China

2.1 Incomplete Legal Safeguard System

Although the *Vocational Education Law* clarifies the typological status of vocational education, the relevant supporting laws and regulations remain underdeveloped. On one hand, the legal provisions regarding the equal status of vocational and general education are insufficiently specific. There is a lack of operable implementation rules concerning resource allocation, advancement pathways, and employment guarantees, making it difficult to realize equal status in practice. On the other hand, there is inadequate legal constraint for industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation. The rights and obligations of enterprises participating in vocational education are ambiguously defined, lacking effective incentive and mechanisms. This leads to superficial industry-education integration, failing to adequately support the manifestation of vocational education's typological attributes.

2.2 Incoherent Institutional Frameworks for Provision

There are numerous obstacles in the articulation within the vocational education system itself

and its connection with the general education system. First, within vocational education, the curriculum systems and cultivation standards between secondary and higher vocational education lack effective articulation, resulting in issues of repetitive teaching or gaps, making it difficult to achieve a progressive enhancement of technical skills. Second, the mechanisms for integrating vocational and general education are imperfect. The pathways for vocational education students to advance to general education are narrow, and there is a lack of targeted curriculum adaptation and assessment mechanisms. This often renders vocational education a “one-way path,” failing to meet individuals’ diverse development needs. Third, vocational education institutions have insufficient autonomy. Excessive government intervention hinders schools from flexibly adjusting program offerings and cultivation plans according to industrial needs, constraining the development of vocational education’s typological characteristics.

2.3 Incompatible Faculty and Evaluation Systems

Faculty development and evaluation systems misaligned with the typological positioning have become significant factors constraining the quality improvement of vocational education. In terms of faculty, issues include a low proportion of “dual-qualification” teachers and insufficient practical teaching capabilities. Many teachers lack enterprise work experience, making it difficult to conduct practical teaching that aligns closely with job requirements. Furthermore, mechanisms for faculty training and professional title evaluation still largely follow general education standards, emphasizing academic research capability while neglecting practical teaching ability and vocational skill levels, which is detrimental to building a “dual-qualification” teaching force. Regarding evaluation systems, an academic orientation still predominates, focusing on indicators like advancement rates and academic qualifications while overlooking core metrics such as vocational skill levels and job adaptability. This fails to highlight the typological value of vocational education.

3 Construction of an Institutional Guarantee System for the Typological Positioning of Vocational Education

3.1 Perfect the Legal Safeguard System to Consolidate the Foundation of Typological Positioning

Centering on the *Vocational Education Law*, construct a comprehensive system of supporting laws and regulations to clarify the typological status and developmental guarantees for vocational education. First, refine the legal clauses pertaining to equal status. Develop specific implementation rules regarding resource allocation, advancement and employment, and funding investment, explicitly stating that vocational education enjoys equal policy support and resource guarantees as general education, and prohibiting various forms of employment discrimination and advancement restrictions. Second, improve legal norms for industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation. Define the rights and obligations of enterprises, schools, and governments. Establish incentive mechanisms for enterprise participation in vocational education, offering policy support such as tax reductions and subsidies to enterprises engaged in school-enterprise cooperation. Simultaneously, clarify the educational responsibilities of enterprises and strengthen constraint mechanisms. Third, to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of stakeholders in vocational education, providing solid legal support for its typological development.

3.2 Optimize Institutional Frameworks for Provision to Build an Articulated and Cohesive System

Based on the typological attributes of vocational education, improve the institutional frameworks for provision to promote smooth articulation within the vocational education system and its connection with the general education system. First, construct a cultivation system with gradient articulation between secondary and higher vocational education. Unify standards for program establishment and curriculum systems, promote the standardized development of “secondary-higher vocational articulation” and pathways, realizing layered cultivation and continuous enhancement of technical skills. Second, , broaden advancement pathways for vocational

education students, establish pilot programs for vocational-general education integration, and promote course cross-selection and credit mutual recognition to meet individuals' diverse development needs. Third, expand the autonomy of vocational education institutions. Reduce government administrative intervention, allow schools to flexibly adjust program offerings, cultivation plans, and teaching models according to industrial demands, thereby strengthening the industrial adaptability of vocational education.

3.3 Strengthen Faculty Development and Perfect Typology-Aligned Evaluation Mechanisms

Construct faculty development and evaluation systems compatible with the typological positioning of vocational education to enhance its educational quality. Regarding faculty development: First, increase the scale of cultivating "dual-qualification" teachers. Establish school-enterprise collaborative faculty development mechanisms, requiring teachers to engage in regular practical training at enterprises to improve their practical teaching capabilities. Second, perfect faculty recruitment mechanisms. Relax the entry requirements for enterprise-based technical and skilled talents, encourage industry experts and skilled masters to serve as part-time instructors, and optimize the structure of the teaching force. Third, reform professional title evaluation mechanisms. Establish evaluation standards centered on practical teaching ability, vocational skill levels, and educational effectiveness, moving away from the constraints of academically-oriented evaluation. Regarding evaluation systems: Construct a diversified evaluation mechanism. Introduce third-party evaluators such as enterprises and industry associations. Emphasize core indicators like vocational skill levels, job adaptability, and employment quality, forming an evaluation system that aligns with the typological attributes of vocational education.

4. Conclusion

Clarifying the typological positioning of vocational education is an inevitable choice for the reform and development of vocational education in China, as well as a crucial measure for perfecting the modern education system and supporting industrial upgrading. As an independent educational type, vocational education possesses unique educational value and developmental logic. The realization of its typological positioning is inseparable from a well-developed institutional guarantee system. Currently, China's typological positioning of vocational education still faces numerous challenges in legal safeguards, institutional articulation, faculty development, and social recognition. It is necessary to construct a comprehensive, multi-level institutional guarantee system through measures such as perfecting supporting laws and regulations, optimizing institutional frameworks for provision, strengthening faculty and evaluation system development, increasing resource guarantees, and deepening industry-education integration. This will address the difficulties in implementing the typological positioning, cultivate high-quality technical and skilled talents, and provide robust support for building a skilled society and achieving high-quality economic and social development.

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