A Study on the "Dual Disconnection" Problem Between Theory and Practice in Vocational Education Under High-Quality Development

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Abstract: With the high-quality development of China's economy, vocational education, as a crucial pathway for cultivating skilled talents, requires an effective integration of theory and practice. Meanwhile, high-quality development has become a key direction and goal for deepening reforms in China’s vocational education in the new era. However, in the process of vocational education development, there exists a "dual disconnection" problem, where theory and practice are fragmented and mutually detached. This issue manifests as a disjunction between educational theories and the actual needs of industries, making it difficult for students to apply their acquired knowledge flexibly in real work settings. Through an in-depth analysis of the current state of vocational education theory and practice, this paper identifies the critical gaps within the vocational education system. Furthermore, it explores the impact of these issues on the quality of vocational education and proposes a series of targeted solutions. Guided by a balanced and comprehensive strategic perspective, this study aims to systematically advance the development of vocational education, fundamentally enhancing its overall quality to better meet the dual demands of socioeconomic progress and individual student development.

Keywords: Vocational Education; High-Quality Development; Theory and Practice; "Dual Disconnection" Problem

I.Introduction

High-quality development is a new imperative for China's economic progress, with its core focus on enhancing human resource quality and technical capabilities. As the primary source of skilled technical talents, the quality of vocational education directly impacts the nation’s capacity for innovation and economic competitiveness. However, vocational education faces significant challenges in integrating theory with practice, a phenomenon referred to as the "dual disconnection" problem. This issue not only affects the quality of vocational education but also influences the alignment between talent cultivation and socioeconomic development needs.

The "dual disconnection" problem is primarily manifested in the gap between theoretical instruction and practical training, making it difficult for students to effectively apply learned theories in real-world operations. Consequently, vocational skills often fail to align with market demands. Zhang Jian (2024) pointed out that the "dual disconnection" in vocational education mainly manifests in two aspects: the lag of theory behind practice and the rejection of theory by practice. This situation results in the "de-practicalization" of theoretical education and the "de-theorization" of practical training, leading to a lack of effective interaction and integration between the two.

To address this challenge, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued the Opinions on Promoting the High-Quality Development of Modern Vocational Education (China Government Network, 2021), which explicitly calls for optimizing the structure of vocational education supply, prioritizing the development of emerging disciplines aligned with industrial needs, and emphasizing the close connection between vocational education and socioeconomic development. Additionally, the China Vocational Education Development Report (Ministry of Education of China, 2024), released at the World Vocational and Technical Education Development Conference, highlights China's

vocational education achievements and future plans, providing valuable insights into the current status and development trends of vocational education.

High-quality vocational education is both a product of historical evolution and a necessity of the present era, reflecting public expectations for an education system that meets societal needs (Zhang Jinggang, 2022). Therefore, under the high-quality development framework, resolving the "dual disconnection" problem between vocational education theory and practice is of utmost urgency. The high-quality development of vocational education requires not only theoretical guidance but also effective practical implementation. However, a noticeable gap remains between the two. Thus, studying the "dual disconnection" issue in vocational education aligns with national objectives for its high-quality development and represents a crucial step toward building a skilled society. By effectively integrating theory and practice, vocational education can better meet the demands of industrial transformation and upgrading, ultimately providing a strong talent foundation for sustainable economic and social development.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the manifestations and causes of the "dual disconnection" issue in vocational education and propose targeted solutions. Through this research, we hope to offer both theoretical support and practical guidance for the high-quality development of vocational education, thereby promoting its comprehensive advancement in China.

II.The Connotation of the "Dual Disconnection" Between Theory and Practice in Vocational Education

Theory and practice are fundamental dimensions of vocational education development, and their organic integration is essential (Zhang Jian, 2024). The "dual disconnection" problem in vocational education refers to the phenomenon of disjunction between theoretical knowledge and practical skills within the vocational education system.

This concept primarily involves two aspects of disconnection: (1) the gap between theoretical teaching and practical training, and (2) the separation between vocational education research and actual educational practice.

1.The Disconnection Between Theoretical Teaching and Practical Training

In vocational education, both theoretical teaching and practical training are indispensable. Theoretical instruction aims to impart specialized knowledge and principles, whereas practical training focuses on developing students' hands-on skills and professional competencies. However, in practice, these two components often fail to integrate effectively, leading to the emergence of the "dual disconnection" problem. The disconnect between theoretical and practical teaching is evident in curriculum design and course implementation. In many vocational education programs, theoretical instruction tends to emphasize knowledge transmission while neglecting its practical application. As a result, students may acquire extensive theoretical knowledge but struggle with real-world operational tasks (Zhang Dandan, 2023). This fragmentation prevents students from developing a holistic and coherent understanding of their field, making it difficult to bridge the gap between knowledge and application, thereby exacerbating the "dual disconnection" issue.

2.The Separation Between Vocational Education Research and Actual Educational Practice

Beyond the disconnect between theoretical and practical teaching, a significant gap also exists between vocational education research and actual teaching practice. This separation manifests in two ways: theoretical research often fails to address real-world needs, and practical challenges in education lack sufficient theoretical guidance.

Vocational education research frequently remains at an abstract level, lacking in-depth analysis and practical applicability. Researchers tend to focus on theoretical framework construction and conceptual discussions while overlooking the integration of theory with practice. Consequently, vocational education theories are often disconnected from real-world educational settings, making it difficult to translate research findings into tangible teaching improvements.

Meanwhile, real-world challenges in vocational education often receive insufficient theoretical responses and support. Due to poor communication between research and practice, many frontline educators struggle to find systematic theoretical explanations and solutions to their teaching difficulties. Without strong theoretical backing, vocational education practices lack the necessary foundation for sustainable innovation and development.

By addressing these two critical gaps, vocational education can better align theoretical advancements with practical demands, fostering a more integrated and effective educational system.

III.Analysis of the Causes of the "Dual Disconnection" Problem Between Theory and Practice in Vocational Education

The formation of the "dual disconnection" problem between theory and practice in vocational education is the result of multiple contributing factors. These factors include both internal issues within the education system and external social and economic influences.

1.Limitations of the Education System

The positioning and developmental path of vocational education within the broader education system is a significant cause of the "dual disconnection" problem. As a distinct type of education, vocational education has not yet achieved the same level of importance as general education. It remains comparatively weak in areas such as school infrastructure, faculty quality, and funding (Wang Luyi, 2024). This limited status makes it difficult for vocational education to receive equal opportunities in theoretical research and practical exploration, leading to insufficient momentum for theoretical innovation and practical improvements. The lack of consensus on top-level design between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the Ministry of Finance, and other governmental departments has resulted in fragmented vocational education resources, hindering effective management and allocation in accordance with educational principles and market mechanisms. This fragmentation obstructs coordinated development (Wu Na, 2016).

Different departments often have conflicting goals and policies, making it challenging to form a unified and effective vocational education development path.

Furthermore, the multi-layered and complex nature of vocational education exacerbates the disconnection between theory and practice. Vocational education includes various levels, such as secondary vocational schools, higher vocational colleges, and applied undergraduate programs, each with distinct educational goals and training methods. However, the current education system fails to provide a unified and flexible resource allocation and policy support for these different levels of vocational education, resulting in fragmented efforts across institutions. This lack of coordination hinders the effective integration of theory and practice.

2.Structural Issues in Curriculum Design

The curriculum is a key driver of talent cultivation, and its alignment with societal needs directly affects the quality of education and, in turn, economic development (Xu Luhan, 2024). Curriculum design is central to the integration of theory and practice in vocational education, yet many vocational institutions face significant structural problems in curriculum design, which are key contributors to the "dual disconnection" issue. On one hand, the curriculum often places excessive emphasis on theoretical knowledge transmission, neglecting the development of practical skills. The heavy focus on theoretical courses, coupled with insufficient time and content for practical training, means that students are unable to effectively translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills within the limited time available.

On the other hand, the disconnection between course content and industry demand is becoming increasingly apparent and is a major bottleneck to the development of vocational education. Many vocational education curricula rely on traditional knowledge frameworks that have not been updated in response to the rapid development of emerging industries and technologies. This lag causes course content to fail to reflect the latest industry trends and technological advancements, leaving students ill-prepared to meet the practical demands of employers. For example, with the rise of new fields like artificial intelligence, big data, and smart manufacturing, the demand for skilled talent in these areas has surged, but vocational institutions have

been slow to adapt their curricula, leading to a significant gap between the skills students acquire and those required by industry. This disconnect between curriculum content and industry needs further exacerbates the gap between theory and practice, affecting both the effectiveness of vocational education and students' employability. Therefore, vocational education urgently needs curriculum reform and closer collaboration with enterprises to update teaching content in real-time, ensuring that the curriculum aligns with industry developments and produces high-quality, market-driven technical talent.

3.Weakness of the Teaching Faculty

The teaching faculty is a core pillar of vocational education, and its quality directly impacts the success of vocational education and the quality of talent cultivation. However, there are clear deficiencies in the practical and theoretical capabilities of vocational education faculty, making this a key challenge to the high-quality development of vocational education. The primary issues in faculty development include inadequate management systems, low professional identity among teachers, and insufficient teaching abilities, which hinder the growth and development of the teaching workforce (Liu Qin, 2021).

The faculty training and evaluation mechanisms also present problems. In some institutions, academic ranking systems based on seniority fail to attract teachers to enhance their professional skills (Yao Bo, 2021). Many vocational institutions prioritize academic achievements over practical teaching abilities in faculty recruitment and evaluation. This academic-oriented evaluation system leads to an imbalance in the faculty structure, with many instructors possessing solid theoretical knowledge but lacking industry experience and hands-on skills. This disjunction between theory and practice makes it difficult for teachers to guide students effectively in applying theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, ultimately impacting the quality of teaching. Conversely, there is a shortage of faculty members with rich practical experience and industry backgrounds, which limits the integration of theory and practice.

Moreover, the weakness of the faculty is further compounded by the lack of professional development and the slow pace at which teachers update their skills. With the rapid pace of technological innovation and industry development, vocational education curricula and training goals need constant updating. However, many vocational institutions have relatively stagnant teaching staff who lack awareness of the latest industry trends and cutting-edge technologies. This gap between teachers' knowledge and industry needs contributes to a disconnect between teaching content and industry demands, ultimately undermining the quality and sustainability of vocational education.

4.Insufficient Depth of School-Enterprise Cooperation

School-enterprise cooperation is an important avenue for bridging the gap between theory and practice in vocational education, yet the depth and breadth of such cooperation remain insufficient. On one hand, many existing school-enterprise cooperation efforts in China focus mainly on peripheral aspects of talent cultivation, with limited emphasis on the core educational functions. As a result, enterprises are not actively engaged in vocational education and tend to focus more on technological research and market expansion, with little investment in talent development. Enterprises typically offer internships but rarely get involved in curriculum design, teaching methods, or other core educational aspects (Li Sheng, 2023).

On the other hand, school-enterprise cooperation often faces conflicting goals between the two parties. Schools tend to focus on theoretical learning and exam results as the main indicators of educational quality, while enterprises are more concerned with students' practical skills and professional qualities, which they view as essential for assessing employees' qualifications and potential. These fundamental differences in goals make it difficult for schools and enterprises to form truly synergistic partnerships. Despite efforts to promote school-enterprise cooperation, the divergence in priorities prevents the real integration of theory and practice, undermining the overall effectiveness of vocational education and hindering the development of high-quality technical talent.

5.Unilateral Evaluation System and Inadequate Standards

The evaluation mechanism in vocational education also exacerbates the "dual disconnection" problem. The primary purpose of vocational education is to equip students with vocational skills to help them integrate into the workforce, support themselves, and become qualified laborers in the new era (Du Guibo, 2024). However, the current evaluation system places too much emphasis on student exam results and teachers' academic achievements, neglecting the assessment of practical skills and teaching effectiveness. This narrow evaluation focus leads students to prioritize exam preparation over mastering practical skills, and teachers to concentrate on theoretical research and academic publication rather than improving practical teaching.

Moreover, the lack of a standardized and comprehensive evaluation system in vocational education further widens the gap between theory and practice. Even in institutions where a quality evaluation system exists, its comparability is limited (Yu Hong, 2024). Additionally, vocational education evaluation standards often lack input from industry stakeholders and fail to reflect market demands or technological advancements. This lag in evaluation standards further distances theory from practice, hindering the development of vocational education that truly meets the needs of the labor market.

IV. Strategies for Solving the "Double Breakpoint" Problem in Vocational Education Theory and Practice

1.Deepening Educational System and Mechanism Reform

The primary task in solving the "Double Breakpoint" problem is to deepen the reform of the vocational education system and mechanisms, providing institutional support for the integration of theory and practice. Systemic and mechanistic reforms play a key role in guiding, coordinating, and incentivizing the high-quality development of vocational education (Wang Luyi, 2024). First, it is essential to clarify the position and development direction of vocational education, elevating it to a level of importance equal to that of general education, while enhancing its appeal and competitiveness through policy support and financial investment. Secondly, a multi-layered, diversified vocational education system should be established to

promote the coordinated development of secondary vocational, higher vocational, and applied undergraduate education, fostering a virtuous cycle of resource sharing and complementary advantages.

Moreover, vocational colleges are the essential elements and main bodies of the modern vocational education system (Shi Nanqi, 2024). It is necessary to improve the management system of vocational education and grant vocational colleges greater autonomy, allowing them to flexibly adjust talent cultivation models and curriculum settings based on industry needs and market changes. Through these system reforms, a favorable external environment for the in-depth integration of theory and practice can be created.

2.Deepening Curriculum Reform and Curriculum Structure Design

As a key element in modern vocational education reform, the adaptability of curriculum planning and construction directly affects the transformation of vocational education's talent cultivation quality, determining the success or failure of vocational education reforms (Hua Ou, 2021). Curriculum reform is the core step in solving the "Double Breakpoint" problem and requires the construction of a curriculum system that integrates theory and practice organically. First, curriculum content should be dynamically updated, adjusting to the latest industry developments and technological changes. Industry expert committees can be established to regularly evaluate and optimize course content, ensuring it closely aligns with actual demands.

Secondly, the design of vocational education curricula should be guided by an integrated approach to theory and practice, emphasizing both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, while fostering their organic integration (Li Xiaojun, 2024). For example, methods such as project-based learning and case teaching can be adopted, allowing students to understand and apply theoretical knowledge through practical operations. At the same time, the proportion of practical courses should be increased, and the duration of experimental training should be extended, providing students with more hands-on opportunities.

3.Strengthening the Construction of the Faculty

The vocational education faculty is a crucial part of the broader teaching workforce in China and a key guarantee for the development of vocational education (Sun Lin, 2020). Faculty strength is vital for the development of vocational education. To address the "Double Breakpoint" problem, it is necessary to strengthen faculty development. First, vocational schools should integrate their faculty structure to improve the overall quality of the teaching staff, optimizing the allocation of teacher resources (Li Feng, 2023). Recruitment and training mechanisms for teachers should be improved, encouraging professionals with industry backgrounds to enter the vocational education field, while also providing current teachers with opportunities for industry practice and training to enhance their practical abilities.

Additionally, the construction of "dual-professional" faculty is crucial for highlighting the characteristics of vocational education (Ruan Shutang, 2025). A comprehensive evaluation and incentive system for dual-professional teachers should be established, integrating practical teaching capabilities and industry influence into the assessment criteria, motivating teachers to explore and innovate in integrating theory and practice. Furthermore, through school-enterprise cooperation, a system for teachers to participate in industry internships can be created, enabling teachers to engage directly with industry, understand industry development trends, and better integrate practical experience into classroom teaching.

4.Strengthening the School-Enterprise Collaborative Education Mechanism

Strengthening the school-enterprise collaborative education mechanism is one of the core paths to solving the "Double Breakpoint" problem in vocational education. School-enterprise cooperation not only helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, but also provides strong support for the high-quality development of vocational education. To fulfill the fundamental requirement of school-enterprise cooperation in talent cultivation, enterprises should be involved in the governance of vocational education, particularly in curriculum development, ensuring that enterprise needs align with the core elements of school-based education (Li Sheng, 2023). To this end, the content and form of school-enterprise cooperation should be further deepened, and a long-term collaborative education mechanism should be constructed.

This mechanism should be based on the deep integration of schools and enterprises, utilizing institutionalized and standardized cooperation models to achieve effective alignment of educational resources and industry needs.

Enterprises should be encouraged to deeply participate in curriculum development, teaching design, and practical guidance, incorporating their technical standards, management norms, and professional requirements into the educational process. As direct reflectors of industry needs, enterprises can provide the most cutting-edge industry information and practical experience for course setting and teaching content. With their participation, course design will be more closely aligned with actual job requirements, and teaching content will become more targeted and practical. Furthermore, the management standards and professional requirements of enterprises will help students better adapt to the workplace, enhancing their overall vocational capabilities. Promoting practice-based teaching models such as "work-study integration" and "internship" is a vital means to strengthen school-enterprise collaboration. These models combine students' learning process with actual work, enabling them to practice in real-world environments, thus effectively transforming theoretical knowledge into practical skills. In the "work-study integration" model, students deepen their understanding of theoretical knowledge through enterprise practice, enhancing their professional skills and hands-on abilities. Meanwhile, "internships" allow students to directly engage in the work of enterprises, accumulate work experience, and develop professional qualities and teamwork abilities.

5.Improving the Diversified Evaluation System and Quality Standards

Improving the diversified evaluation system and quality standards is an important safeguard for promoting the high-quality development of vocational education. Zhao Zehou et al. (2024) point out that vocational education aims to cultivate professional talents who can meet the needs of society and industries. In response to the urgent demand for high-quality technical skills talents in modern society, constructing a multidimensional evaluation model for vocational education students' development has become an essential measure to ensure the quality of talent cultivation in vocational colleges. Given the current limitations of the evaluation mechanism, which

tends to rely too heavily on traditional exam scores or theoretical assessments while neglecting practical skills, professional ethics, and comprehensive qualities, constructing a diversified evaluation system that balances theory and practice is urgently needed. During the design of the evaluation system, multi-dimensional evaluation indicators should be considered, including but not limited to theoretical knowledge, practical operation, professional ethics, innovation abilities, and comprehensive qualities. By incorporating evaluations from enterprises, industries, and society, the evaluation system can ensure comprehensive and objective results.

At the same time, vocational education quality standards are critical tools for promoting high-quality vocational education. High-quality standards provide clear guidance for curriculum design, teaching implementation, and talent cultivation in vocational education, while offering a scientific basis for evaluating the quality of talent cultivation in vocational colleges (Sun Cuixiang, 2022). Furthermore, effective feedback and application of evaluation results is an essential part of improving the evaluation system. Vocational colleges should use evaluation outcomes as important references for course optimization, teaching improvements, and adjustments in talent cultivation models. By analyzing evaluation data, schools can identify issues and shortcomings in the teaching process, driving continuous adaptation of vocational education to social and industry demands, achieving a close alignment between talent cultivation and industry needs. The application of evaluation results will not only drive the continuous improvement of vocational education but also provide scientific foundations for enhancing teaching quality, ultimately realizing the high-quality development of vocational education.

V. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of high-quality development, vocational education serves as a crucial pathway for cultivating high-caliber technical and skilled talents. The "double breakpoint" problem between theory and practice demands urgent attention and resolution. Vocational education not only plays a key role in driving industrial upgrading and economic transformation but also serves as a core pathway for

promoting social equity and enabling individual career development. However, the disconnect between theory and practice significantly hampers the effectiveness of vocational education, leading to a mismatch between talent cultivation and societal needs, ultimately affecting the quality and efficiency of vocational education.

Addressing the "double breakpoint" problem in vocational education requires a multi-stakeholder, systematic approach. The solution to this issue relies not only on profound internal reforms within vocational institutions but also on broad participation and close cooperation among the government, enterprises, and society. Vocational institutions should optimize their curriculum systems, enhance practical teaching components, and improve teachers' professional competencies to ensure a close alignment between educational content and industry demands. The government should increase policy support and financial investment, establishing a comprehensive policy framework to incentivize enterprise participation in vocational education. Enterprises should actively engage in vocational education by providing internship opportunities and real-work scenarios, ensuring that students gain hands-on experience in authentic professional environments. Additionally, society at large should pay close attention to and support the development of vocational education, fostering a positive social atmosphere that facilitates the organic integration of theory and practice.

Through the concerted efforts of all stakeholders, vocational education can achieve high-quality development, enhancing the effectiveness of talent cultivation and providing a solid human resource foundation for the sustainable advancement of the economy and society. This not only strengthens national industrial competitiveness but also promotes social equity and individual career development, making a significant contribution to sustainable social progress.

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