

Study on the Influencing Factors of Chinese Students Attending Private High Schools

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Abstract. After the official implementation of China's 'General Employment Diversion' policy on high school entrance examination, only about 50 percent of students will win the competition for senior high school education while the rest will enter vocational schools. This policy has led to the trend of parents choosing private high schools in China. Based on a detailed explanation of the general employment diversion policy, this paper analyzes the factors that affect Chinese parents' choice of private high schools and vocational schools by integrating three representative cases through interview analysis, and analyzes the family and social conflicts caused by the general employment diversion policy from a multi-dimensional perspective, as well as possible solutions. Through the reference of the existing research results of the general employment diversion policy and the interview of three cases, Chinese parents with different economic conditions are more inclined to choose high school education, which leads to the competition of educational resources in private high schools, as well as family conflicts and economic burdens. To standardize and improve the teaching and management of private high schools and vocational schools, and to change the cognitive limitations of public opinion on vocational education are crucial to realizing the equity of high school education.

Keywords: High School Entrance Examination; General Employment Diversion Policy; Interviewing Method; Private High School.

1. Introduction

In China, more and more junior high school graduates are choosing to go to private high schools after taking the high school entrance examination, especially from 2023, which means that more and more Chinese parents choose to pay several times more tuition fees than public high schools for their children to study in private high schools. Instead of the subjective view of parents and students, the main driving force of this phenomenon is the implementation of China's new national education policy.

1.1. Research Background

On April 20, 2022, the new Vocational Education Law was revised and adopted, and came into effect on May 1, 2022 [1]. The Ministry of Education has officially implemented the policy of redistributing the senior high school entrance examination in mainland China. Compared with the 'general employment diversion' before the revision, the new proposal of 'promoting the coordinated development of general employment according to local conditions in different stages after compulsory education' has aroused widespread public concern.

This policy is translated as 'General and Vocational Education Differentiation Policy in China' and 'Policy of Academic and Vocational Streamlining in China' in academic circles, which better reflect the content and context of the policy. As the political and academic translations are relatively lengthy, the policy is referred to in this article as the policy of general employment diversion.

At present, China's high schools are divided into two types, the first one is the state-funded public high school, and the second one is the ordinary private high school. The tuition fee of the former is mainly paid by the government, while that of the latter is paid by families. According to the document



of the Chinese Ministry of Education, 'The Notice of the Ministry of Education on the Overall Management of the Enrollment of High School Education', the policy of general employment diversion would divide secondary school graduates into high schools and vocational schools at the proportion of 5:5.

The main basis of the general employment diversion policy is the test results of the high school entrance examination, and the main standard is that the top 50% of students can go to state-funded high schools, and the top 10% of students can go to key public high schools. The last 50 percent of students will be transferred or directly assigned to vocational schools. Therefore, students with poor results in the high school entrance examination will naturally be eliminated in the competition of public high school resources.

According to the relevant data released by the Ministry of Education and the National Bureau of Statistics, in recent years, the ratio of general job diversion can still be maintained at about 6:4 [2]. The gross enrollment rate of senior middle schools was 91.6%, 0.2% points higher than the previous year. There were 15,000 regular high schools nationwide, an increase of 441 or 3.02% over the previous year. Regular high schools enrolled 4,475,400 students, 425,900 more than the previous year, an increase of 4.71%. There were 7,201 secondary vocational schools nationwide, 93 fewer than in the previous year [3].

According to the news report of the Beijing News, Chen Ziji, director of the Vocational Education Department of the Ministry of Education, answered the question of the Beijing News reporter at the press conference, for the problem of "General Employment Diversion Policy", and said that we should pay attention to the keyword "local conditions", that is, do not "one-size-fits-all", and allow the proportion of public high schools and vocational schools differ within a certain range, which provides a policy basis for private high school enrollment [4].

1.2. Research Topic

This paper analyzes the influencing factors and the driving force of junior high school graduates attending private high schools in China as well as the impact of the general employment diversion policy on Chinese families, and discusses the social problems brought about by the implementation of the policy.

1.3. Research Method

This paper mainly adopts the research method of interview, through the specific analysis and discussion of three representative cases, reflecting the social impact brought by the adjustment of China's high school entrance examination education policy.

1.4. Research Significance

With the popularization of high school education in China, more parents tend to choose high school education. According to a survey, 63.7% of students choose regular high schools, only 20.5% choose secondary vocational schools, and 10.5% choose key high schools under the condition of paying high school selection fees [5].

The official implementation of the general employment diversion policy in mainland China in 2023 has produced the first batch of students and families who subjectively or passively choose private high schools because of this policy, breaking the social reality that Chinese society had always been dominated by public high school education.

This topic analyzes the implementation of the general employment diversion policy and the resulting social problems, which is a very time-effective research topic. This topic has high academic value for analyzing the direction of China's education system reform and the subsequent adjustment direction of China's education policy.

2. Method

The implementation of the general employment diversion policy, people expected that middle-class and upper-class families would send their children who did not meet the academic requirement of public high school to ordinary private secondary schools, which is also able to continue high school and take part in university entrance examinations, while poor families, unable to afford the expensive tuition fee, would send their children who did not meet the academic requirement of public high school to vocational high school. But based on interviews, the reality doesn't quite match people's expectations.

2.1. Research Object

This paper mainly establishes three case studies through interview method. The three cases are three families in mainland China, and the selection principles of the three research objects are as follows: First, there are students in the family who have participated in the senior high school entrance examination or are about to participate in the senior high school entrance examination after the implementation of the general employment diversion policy; Second, the economic conditions of the families are representative to a certain extent, which belong respectively to low-income families, middle-income families and high-income families in mainland China; Third, the families come from mainland China and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

The reason why the selection principle of the three cases is mainly based on family background is that the class status of parents has a profound impact on the process of general employment distribution. Whether in the stage of secondary education or higher education, the higher the class status of parents, the lower the probability of their children entering vocational education schools and the greater the probability of entering general education colleges [6,7].

Table 1 presents the details of the three cases, namely, three families (referred to as Family A, B and C), including family financial situation, student's academic performance, and the main problems faced by families to attend private high schools.

Table 1. The Table of Family Economic Situation and Student Situation of Three Cases

	Family Financial Situation	Student's Academic Performance	Main Problems to Attend Private High Schools
Family A	Low-income family; Both parents work for a small grocery store retail business.	Student has just finished the high school entrance examination without meeting public high school requirements; Have a younger brother.	Face a heavy financial burden; Prejudice against vocational education.
Family B	Middle-income family; Taiwanese family; The father works for a Taiwan-funded company in the mainland while mother is a housewife	Student studies in mainland public middle school and will participate in the high school entrance examination next year; Only child.	Family disagreement on private high school education.
Family C	High-income family with assets of over 100 million; Family runs a environmental material company in mainland.	Student studies in mainland public middle school and will participate in the high school entrance examination next year; Have a younger sister.	Choose between private high schools and international high schools; Competition of private schools admissions;

2.2. Interview Process

In the three cases, face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews were conducted for 30 minutes to 1 hour. The results of the interview are mainly recorded and then compiled into the following content.

The outline of the interview mainly focuses on the following aspects: the family's economic income; Student's academic performance; Parents' attitudes towards private high schools and vocational education; The main contradiction of attending a private high school.

3. Interview Results

3.1. Low-income Family: Private High School or a Ruined Life

Family A is the one that people think would give up going to private high schools because of the high cost. They live in suburban area while private high schools are located in the city center. In addition to the high tuition fee, they also face the cost of accommodation for their child, the transportation and time cost of driving one hour each way.

For Family A, covering the cost of private high school is a heavy financial burden. The parents said, 'I have another son in elementary school in the suburb, but I have to give my child a high school education otherwise his life would be destroyed.' When asked why vocational education means a failed life, parents said that problems such as puppy love, school bullying, dropping out of school, mental diseases and teenage pregnancy in vocational schools are constantly reported in the media.

Family A reflects the negative attitude of vocational education by families with relatively poor economic conditions, which comes from the negative reputation of vocational education, social prejudice against vocational education, and the biased media publicity. Under the dual pressure of traditional concepts and public opinion, families with relatively poor economic conditions are struggling to pay for private high school education.

3.2. Taiwanese Middle-income family: Family Disagreement on Vocational Education

According to 'the Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Education on Further standardizing the Order of Secondary School Entrance Examination Work', in addition to the provisions of laws and regulations and relevant national policies, students of overseas Chinese, students from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and students of ethnic minority will be given extra points in high school entrance exam, and the extra points will not exceed 20 points.

Although a Taiwanese student can get 20 extra points in the mainland's high school entrance exam, this has not stopped the anxiety of Family B, the cause of which is not the tuition fee of private high schools, but the contrary views of parents. The student, like thousands of junior high school students, has spent two months of after-school tutoring during the summer vacation, including class lessons and private lessons, and has spent a total of more than 20,000 yuan during the two-month vacation while the father became less and less willing to pay for extra lessons.

The father from Taiwan thought that if the student does not get into a public high school, it is not necessary or worthwhile to spend the tuition fee to attend a private high school while the mother from the mainland insists on her attending high school, whether it is a public high school or a private high school. But the father insists that it is good enough for a girl to learn a skill in a vocational school in Taiwan so that she could work and earn money to support herself, instead of spending so much money for a girl to attend a private high school, receive higher education or go abroad for further study.

With the official implementation of the general employment diversion policy in 2023, China's vocational education has entered a new stage of development. Prior to the implementation of the policy, mainland China had been focusing on the construction of higher education. The contradiction of family B comes from the imbalanced development of vocational education between Mainland

China and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, which brings about the difference in the concept of vocational education between parents of both sides.

In addition, the case of Family B also reflects that when high school education has become a scarce resource, gender discrimination in education has gradually emerged. At the level of individual characteristics, gender and ethnicity will affect the process of general employment diversion. At the secondary education stage, males and ethnic minorities are more likely to enter secondary vocational education than ordinary senior high school education [8].

For the economic situation of middle-income families, how to optimize the allocation of limited resources and whether there is a difference in the cost performance of receiving higher education between different genders have become the causes of family conflicts.

3.3. High-income Family: Competition on Private School Admission

The problems faced by Family C have nothing to do with the economy. Their children's academic performance is in the bottom ten percent of public middle schools, so they have contacted private high schools and international schools one year in advance, and have earnestly consulted the admission requirements and admission standards of private schools. The parents said that the admission of good private high school is based on the test result of high school entrance examination so they are urging their children to take expensive after-school classes while considering private international schools.

Since high school education has become a scarce resource, faced with limited opportunities, parents are uncertain about the admission capacity of private high schools, regardless of the high tuition fee and accommodation fee. In this battle for high school education resources, rich families have one more option than ordinary families, international high schools, while ordinary families can only compete for limited educational resources in the context of limited number of private high schools in China. In addition to competition for academic performance, high school education has become a competition of capital. In this game, how to maintain the fairness and justice of high school education becomes a question that needs to be considered.

4. Discussion

As a new subject, the social problems brought about by the general employment diversion policy are prominent. According to the interviews of the three cases, the problems mainly include: social prejudice towards vocational education; High tuition fees at private secondary schools; The competition of high school education resources; High school education equity.

4.1. Reasons

The problems exposed by the three cases are the lack of overall planning and coordinated development of high school education and vocational education in the early days of the formal implementation of the general employment diversion policy. In fact, the coordinated development of high school education and vocational education is very important for the achievement of education and the realization of education for all. The distribution of general employment is the basis for promoting education for all [9]. High school education has always been the focus of EFA, and the dropout rate of high school has a direct impact on EFA results in a country and even in the world. The United Nations EFA documents, EFA monitoring, EFA management and promotion organizations of various countries regard high school education as the key to EFA [10].

In accordance with the development of education and society in different regions, it is very important to coordinate the proportional development of senior high school education and vocational education, and to give play to the role of the policy of general vocational separation to control dropout and promote education for all.

One of the main reasons for these contradictions is the relatively backward foundation of vocational education development in mainland China. A series of problems such as puppy love, campus bullying, school dropout, mental illness, and teenage pregnancy happened in vocational schools are mainly due to the inadequate management of vocational schools themselves, the lax enrollment standards, and the low quality of education.

In the traditional concept of China, many people tend to believe in the "general education superiority theory", that graduates of high school education have greater development space and higher income than graduates of vocational education, and the return rate of education is higher than vocational education, in fact, this is no theoretical basis of social opinion [11].

Secondly, the publicity of vocational education by the media mainly focuses on problems of vocational schools, which leads to the negative attitude of the public opinion towards vocational schools and the weakening of the reputation of vocational education, which forms a vicious circle. The development policy of vocational education has been misinterpreted at the public level. Although the key point of the development of the general job-sharing policy has arrived, its development is still facing greater pressure at the present stage [12]. However, the publicity of higher education by the media is relatively more active, mainly focusing on the academic achievements and achievements of higher education, so the traditional concept that higher education is a better way out has been intensified, and the discrimination and prejudice against vocational education by public opinion has also been intensified.

Thirdly, as a new educational policy, the general employment diversion policy is not specific enough for the details of vocational education. Under the background of the general employment diversion policy, what is the enrollment standard of vocational education, the management mode of vocational education, and the destination of vocational education graduates urgently need an official answer. The lack of information brings speculation and fear to society.

4.2. Suggestion

According to the statistics of the project team "China's Vocational Education Development Strategy and System Innovation Research" of the Social Development Department of the National Development and Reform Commission, in the past decades, the countries and regions with rapid economic change and development are often those with rapid structural development and change of vocational education [13].

As a big manufacturing country, China's secondary vocational education cannot be abandoned and must be retained. 'Technology's unique knowledge system and thinking model require the training of applied talents at the middle school level [14].'

The Ministry of Education should improve the detailed rules of the general employment diversion policy and standardize the operation of private high schools, vocational education and vocational schools from a macro level. For example, clarify the enrollment norms and enrollment standards, regulate the tuition fees and other fees, make requirements for the management norms of private high schools and vocational schools, and ensure the fairness of secondary education.

Vocational schools themselves should strengthen the management of education syllabi, teachers' teaching activities and students' daily study and life, reduce the occurrence of problems, improve reputation, and gradually reduce social discrimination and prejudice against vocational schools. Education and teaching activities in vocational schools should be employment-oriented and pay attention to practicability to establish a sound vocational qualification certificate system, vocational education system and school-enterprise cooperation system [2].

In addition, vocational schools should create opportunities for students to attend higher education. At present, the secondary vocational education in developed countries generally appears the trend of upward movement, even in Germany, which has the characteristics of dual system, the secondary

vocational education and training are also facing the pattern of upward movement of academic qualifications [15].

The media's publicity of private high schools and vocational education should be more objective, and the problems and results should be presented to the society objectively. For the follow-up impact of the implementation of the general employment diversion policy, the media should continue to follow up, such as the learning and development of students, the relevant rules of the policy, etc., but also to supervise and urge private high schools and vocational schools to regulate management.

5. Conclusion

As the topic of general employment diversion policy is brand new, there are few achievements in the domestic academic circles on the policy research, so the research method of interview is chosen.

The research results of this paper also have some limitations. The principle of case selection in this paper is mainly family economic income as the financial situation of parents has impact on the process of decisions on private high schools or vocational schools. Three cases of low-income families, middle-income families and high-income families are selected, which are representative to a certain extent, but cannot cover all the situations of families facing the high school entrance examination in China and all social evaluations of vocational education.

In addition, there are many factors that affect the implementation of the policy, such as the education level of students' parents, ethnic factors and regional factors. The ethnic factor relates to the country's extra points policy for overseas, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan and ethnic minority students in high school entrance examinations. Regional factors refer to the unbalanced development of private higher education and vocational education in the eastern, central and western regions of mainland China.

The implementation of the general employment policy has brought some social problems, such as the pressure of tuition fees in private high schools, the prejudice of the society towards vocational education, the lack of management of vocational education, and the fairness and justice of high school education. The solution of these problems requires the long-term joint efforts of the national social schools and the media. Clear policy details, standardize school management, media follow-up is indispensable.

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