

Research on the Development Model and Training Path of “Chinese + Vocational Skills” Education for Five Central Asian Countries

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Abstract: Xinjiang has become one of the main destinations for students from Central Asian countries to study in China. The exchanges between China and Central Asian countries have a long history. The high level of the “Belt and Road” Initiative has further promoted the in-depth exchanges between China and Central Asian countries. High-quality development needs a higher level of “language, technology, cross-culture” of the compound talents ^[1]. The new educational cooperation model of “Chinese + Vocational Skills” is exactly in line with the requirements of the development of the era and is ready to emerge. At present, “Chinese + Vocational Skills” education in Central Asian countries is still in the preliminary stage of exploration, facing the construction of multiple cooperation platforms for Central Asian groups, the shortage of teachers with dual abilities, the need for further improvement of “Chinese + vocational skills” teaching materials, and the deep integration of multiple subjects in the field of cooperation ^[2]. Clarifying the existing development mode of “Chinese +” education will help the comprehensive reform and long-term development of “Chinese +” education, aiming at improving the pertinacity and effectiveness of training advanced language and technical talents in Central Asia.

Keywords: Central Asia; Vocational skills; Development model

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1. Definition of the concept of “Chinese + Vocational Education” and review of relevant literature

Recently, the research on “Chinese + Vocational Skills” education mainly focuses on the construction of a theoretical framework, personnel training model, and main principles of guidance. “Chinese +” usually refers to an education model that combines Chinese learning with other disciplines or vocational fields. In December 2019, at the International Conference on Chinese Language Education, state leaders made an important directive to integrate special courses that meet the needs of cooperation and development into international Chinese language teaching and actively promote the “Chinese + Vocational skills” project, to help more people

master Chinese language skills while learning Chinese. At this point, the concept of “Chinese + Vocational skills” was officially put forward ^[3]. This model aims to cultivate versatile talents with Chinese language ability and specific professional skills. As of the first half of 2024, the Belt and Road trade has continued to grow, and more than 60 countries and regions have become China’s trading partners. The continuous positive data will be of great benefit to the development of “Chinese +” ^[4].

The development of the “Chinese +” education model not only helps to meet the international community’s demand for Chinese talents but also promotes the integration of international Chinese education with different fields, providing learners with a broader space for career development. Since the conclusion of the Confucius Institute Conference in 2018, China’s “Chinese +” program has offered a series of characteristic courses tailored to local conditions, promoting the cross-integration of the Chinese language with other subject areas. In 2019, the “Chinese + Vocational Skills” Forum was successfully held. In 2020, the Ministry of Education issued a document on the Action Plan for Improving the Quality of Vocational Education, which makes a comprehensive deployment and overall plan for “Chinese +” education, and points out that the “Chinese + Vocational Skills” program needs to go global. In 2020, the country’s first international promotion base of “Chinese + Vocational Skills” was officially launched in Nanjing.

With time, some scholars began to pay attention to the substantive problems faced by “Chinese + Vocational Skills” education ^[5]. Based on the practical challenges, the academic circle has carried out research on the international promotion of “Chinese +” under the background of “The Belt and Road,” pointing out that under the standard of vocational skills construction, the three problems of Chinese + education need to be solved, and put forward effective solutions. In addition, based on the realistic challenges, the academic community has carried out the international promotion of “Chinese +”, including the construction of vocational Chinese ability level standards, the development of Chinese + teaching materials, the training mode of Chinese + vocational skills, and the construction of dual teachers and dual ability teachers ^[6]. Through the review of the above literature, Chinese + vocational education has attracted the attention of the academic community. From the perspective of regional and national studies, the existing researches mainly focus on Africa and Southeast Asia, while the research on “Chinese + Vocational Skills” in the five Central Asian countries is still a blue ocean. With the continuous promotion of the community of common destiny between China and Central Asia, inspired by the “Belt and Road” Initiative, there is great potential for the development of “Chinese +” in Central Asia.

2. Investigation of the current situation of the development model of “Chinese + Vocational Skills” international cooperation cases

With the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, the application of the “Chinese +” education model in different countries has shown diversified and personalized characteristics. By combining Chinese learning with other professional fields, the education model cultivates interdisciplinary talents with Chinese language ability as well as specific professional skills ^[7]. Through consulting relevant literature, Thailand has more cooperation with China in the field of “Chinese + Vocational Skills” education, which has formed a scale. In March 2019, the College of Language and Vocational Education jointly established by the education departments of China and Thailand marked the deepening and concrete cooperation between China and Thailand in the field of Chinese education, expanding the channels and providing a broader platform for all-round cooperation in vocational education between the two countries ^[8]. In September of the same year, the first Thailand Vocational Education Skills Competition was held at Jilada Institute of Technology, covering several major fields such as engineering.

49 secondary and higher vocational colleges participated in the competition, covering thousands of students^[9]. With the acceleration of the industrialization process and the implementation of national development strategies in Central Asian countries, they attach great importance to the construction of vocational education, and the training of high-quality vocational and skilled personnel is imminent.

Central Asian countries encourage various forms of vocational education development such as cooperation in running schools with overseas and private financing. At present, they have established relatively complete higher vocational education systems and are constantly deepening exchanges and cooperation with Chinese-funded enterprises. However, there are still practical problems such as a disconnect between the type of talent and the demand of the labor market and the need to improve the training of vocational talents^[10].

2.1. Brand creation has accelerated the rapid development of “Chinese + Vocational Skills” in terms of quality and efficiency

The creation of the brand, “Chinese +” condenses the heart and gathers strength, forming a resultant effect. The “Chinese Workshop” project of the Language Cooperation Center is the largest brand in China at present, which has been distributed in 16 countries. The Silk Road College in Zhejiang has established projects in 29 countries, and the Luban Workshop in Tianjin has established projects in 21 countries, in addition, the Dayu College in Henan and the Zheng He College in Jiangsu have built 10 overseas schools. Fujian has built “Silk College” and so on.

The establishment of the above international brands not only paved the way for the “Chinese + Vocational skills” major but also provided students with employment opportunities and opportunities to participate in local projects of Chinese-funded enterprises. While mastering skills, they could better integrate into the process of globalization and lay a solid language foundation and talent foundation for strengthening exchanges and cooperation between countries.

2.2. Co-construction of schools and enterprises, giving play to the professional advantages of “Chinese + Vocational Skills” transformation and upgrading

Explore overseas co-construction cooperation institutions, enhance the ability of international education, and create new value of school-enterprise co-construction. Among them, Fiberhome Industrial College, jointly established by Wuhan Software Engineering Vocational College and Indonesia, trains overseas local employees for Chinese-funded enterprises^[11]. The overseas branch of Geller University provides language, culture and skills training for local employees of Chinese enterprises in Thailand. Jinhua Vocational and Technical College provides “Chinese + Vocational skills” training for Chinese enterprises in Rwanda. The first Cambodian-Chinese University of Applied Science and Technology in China was jointly built by Nanjing Polytechnic University and the Cambodian-Chinese Council of Cambodia, and the first Confucius Institute for vocational education overseas has been set up to seamlessly integrate “Chinese language education” and “vocational skills education.”

A large number of Chinese-funded enterprises have established themselves in Central Asia, providing a large number of job opportunities for Central Asian countries. According to the employment policies of Central Asian countries, the ratio of local employees to local employees is 2:8. At present, skilled personnel in transportation, mining, energy, agriculture, electricity, digital information and other industries have become a scarce resource in the region.

On February 16, 2022, Urumqi Vocational University and Almaty Logistics and Transportation University of Kazakhstan jointly built the “Economic School”^[12], which set an example and became the first vocational

college in Xinjiang to run overseas vocational education in the field of vocational education. On May 20, 2024, teachers from Almaty Logistics and Transportation University of Kazakhstan came to Urumqi Vocational University to participate in the training on Chinese + smart logistics^[13]. In 2024, the university will introduce a third-party company to jointly build a smart logistics training center overseas. Through the tripartite cooperation, the school will jointly promote the orderly development of the “Chinese + Vocational Skills” project.

3. The “Chinese + Vocational Skills” talent training path for Central Asia

Chinese + Vocational Skills is a comprehensive development plan that integrates language and technology. The extensive application of Chinese in business communication, international trade and technical exchange is a new model for the development of international Chinese education^[14].

3.1. Build a diversified cooperation platform for Central Asian youth groups, focusing on practical training of industrial skills

It is important to continue to carry out cultural and technological exchange activities between China and Central Asia such as the Silk Road International Expo and Global Silk Road Tour. The winter and summer holidays to carry out social practice activities during the Belt and Road summer vacation, including field visits, observation and learning, research and visits to training bases of Sino-foreign joint ventures.

Deepen exchanges and cooperation among institutions of higher learning, improve the teaching of universal cross-cultural knowledge in the countries along the “Belt and Road,” reduce the theoretical and systematic teaching content, and increase the country type and practical cases. Universities should formulate an effective results-oriented evaluation system and set up syllabuses for specialized skills courses in different categories. Encourage students to continue to pay attention to the trend of vocational skills and employment, and improve their independent professional skills and abilities.

3.2. Strengthen the high-quality development team of “double professional and double ability” teachers

“Double-qualified and dual-capable” teachers are a teacher training model proposed in the field of education in recent years. It refers to the composite professional teachers who have the ability of both theoretical and practical teaching. Vocational education should not only cultivate the vocational skills of overseas students but also pay attention to the training of teachers who can engage in vocational education. Vocational education should not only cultivate the vocational skills of overseas students but also pay attention to the training of teachers who can engage in vocational education. How to train teachers of different regions and countries, different levels of education, and different types of education in different ways is the need to integrate, plan, and coordinate during the “14th Five-Year Plan” period^[15]. Strengthening the Chinese + vocational skills required by the dual teachers can not only improve the quality of vocational education teaching but also the teacher’s words and deeds can promote the comprehensive development of students, cultivating talents with international vision.

3.3. Research and develop a series of supporting “three modernizations” and “Chinese + Vocational Skills” teaching materials

At present, the “Chinese + Vocational Skills” education in Central Asian countries is still in the preliminary stage of exploration, and the textbooks suitable for “Chinese + Vocational Skills” are also

an urgent problem to be solved. The research and development of a series of localized, industry-oriented and cooperative supporting textbooks is conducive to the high-quality development of “Chinese + Vocational Skills.” The “Chinese + Vocational Skills” education can effectively improve the skills and language skills of local people through short-term training, non-academic education, academic education and other ways, alleviate the contradiction in talent demand of Chinese-funded enterprises, and help enterprises reduce costs and increase efficiency. At the same time, more efforts should be made to develop digital teaching resources and build online learning platforms to meet the personalized learning needs of learners. The development of science and technology has provided new tools and research fields for international Chinese education. Educational institutions are encouraged to work with enterprises to design courses and training programs according to market needs. The skills learned by the trainees are in line with the needs of the industry, improving the adaptability and flexibility of the trainees in employment.

3.4. Strengthen multi-party cooperation in the field of collaboration and promote the deep integration of the industry

Universities will set up research bases for “Chinese + Vocational Education” for Central Asia, conduct regional and country-specific research, and adjust personnel training programs when appropriate to meet the needs of various technical personnel in the industrial development of Central Asian countries. Taking advantage of the current development opportunity of building the core area of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has actively carried out policy exchanges and project negotiations with Central Asian countries, reached bilateral or multilateral agreements on educational cooperation, and promoted the mutual recognition of courses and credits of similar institutions in the two places.

4. Development trend and prospect

It will efficiently link language, technology and cultural exchanges between China and Central Asia, promote cultural consensus between China and Central Asian countries, learn from each other among civilizations, and deepen mutual trust between China and Central Asia. Give full play to the role of the Urumqi International Land Port as “One port,” the Kashgar and Khorgos Economic Development Zone as “two zones,” the transportation hub as “five major centers” of trade and logistics, as well as the port economic belt, the China-Europe freight train and the Central Asia Freight train. While giving full play to the role of Confucius Institutes in Central Asia, the training of local vocational education teachers should be increased, to create new space for further expanding international exchanges and cooperation. Existing teachers in new engineering fields such as new energy vehicles, agricultural and sideline product processing, cross-border e-commerce, traditional Chinese medicine, and transportation should be encouraged to strengthen their Chinese language learning. At the same time, full attention should be paid to the existing problems, how to balance the time allocation of language learning and skill learning, and identify the platform resources for vocational skills training. To sum up, the future development trend and prospects of Chinese + will be influenced by many factors such as the reform of the international Chinese education system, the increase in the number of international students, the development of the application of technology to the Chinese language teaching in the workplace and the transformation and development of the digital economy and society, to do a better and stronger Chinese + vocational education to serve the “Belt and Road” construction and constantly create a new situation for international Chinese education.

Disclosure statement

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