Examining China's Secondary Vocational Diversion Policy: A WPR Framework Analysis

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Abstract. This paper delves into the hurdles and prejudices encountered by vocational and technical education in China, employing Carol Bacchi's WPR (What's the Problem Represented to Be?) framework for analysis. It underscores the uneven allocation of resources, societal viewpoints, and the influence of economic disparities on access to education. Drawing inspiration from the vocational education paradigms in Switzerland and Germany, the paper proposes alternative solutions. It underscores the urgency for a holistic overhaul of the education system, amalgamation of general and vocational education, and a shift in societal attitudes. The paper concludes that tackling these issues will pave the way for equitable educational opportunities and brighter futures for all Chinese students.

Keywords: Vocational Education; Secondary Vocational Diversion; General Vocational Integration.

1. Introduction

China has primarily benefited from its demographic dividend in the past decade, relying on a large pool of low-cost labor within an economically driven system. However, as China gradually transitions towards an aging society and technologically driven industries, the country faces a labor shortage. In the future, China's society may experience sustained negative population growth and an increasingly aging demographic. Consequently, there is a growing demand for skilled professionals to address these pressing societal trends. The general vocational diversion policy has been implemented as part of China's middle school entrance examination reform.

This paper will primarily analyze China's general vocational diversion policy, using the Carol Bacchi's WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be?) method [1]. Information will be gathered through literature review, textual analysis, and interviews to explore the inherent shortcomings of the policy and potential avenues for improvement. Additionally, an attempt will be made to uncover the core reasons behind the obstacles encountered during the policy's implementation.

2. Literature Review

China's education authorities implemented the Middle School Entrance Examination Streamlining Policy in 2023 to address labor shortages and rectify the imbalance in educational resources. This policy aims to redirect a portion of junior high school graduates towards vocational schools or technically related colleges for specialized skills training, rather than enrolling them in regular or prestigious high schools. The goal is to achieve a rough balance in scale between general and vocational high schools [2].

The objectives of this policy include relieving enrollment pressure on regular high schools, nurturing more technical talents for the nation, creating additional employment opportunities, and providing more choices for junior high school graduates [3]. Domestic research on this policy and the relationship between general and vocational education aims to balance general vocational diversion and integration. The hope is to achieve seamless integration of regular and vocational-technical education before secondary education, laying the groundwork for education separation post the middle school entrance examination reform [4-7].

It's important to note that some research views the general vocational diversion policy as dialectical and positive. It recognizes the policy's contribution to socioeconomic and technological development and intends to cultivate professionals with technical skills across various industries. However, this research also raises concerns and doubts about the specific implementation of this policy in China. Given the current state of China's education system and societal norms, mandatory streamlining is challenging for the general population to understand and accept. The policy's progress is expected to face significant resistance, even though it does not oppose general vocational diversion [8-9].

In summarizing the research, it becomes apparent that there are certain immaturities and irrationalities within the general vocational diversion policy. For example, the requirement that public and vocational high schools have roughly equivalent students raises questions about what "roughly equivalent" means. This aspect is not particularly clear at the national policy level, as the focus shifts between the rough equivalence of current students, the rough equality of enrollment numbers, and the rough equivalence of current students and enrollment numbers [10]. The lack of clarity in some aspects of the policy has posed hindrances to its implementation across different regions, as achieving rough equivalence in school numbers may not necessarily translate to equivalent maturity and resource allocation between vocational and general education.

Moreover, the outdated and incomplete state of China's secondary vocational education system leads students and parents to resist the vocational education system unconsciously. From the perspective of constructing a modern vocational education system, secondary vocational education forms the cornerstone. Achieving a high-quality vocational education system remains elusive without resolving fundamental issues in secondary vocational education. Motivating students to pursue studies in vocational-technical schools willingly is challenging when vocational and technical education cannot fully catch up with the pace of regular education. This renders talent cultivation a mere aspiration [11]

There might be a common misconception regarding the general perception of this policy, assuming that solving the problem necessitates adopting the general vocational diversion approach. The increasing demand for vocational and technical talents aligns with the inevitable trends in China's economic development and technological progress. Therefore, it is crucial to develop vocational and technical education fundamentally, patiently lay the groundwork, and ensure a sustainable supply of vocational and technical talents to society. Simple streamlining cannot resolve this issue efficiently [12]. Thus, actively promoting vocational and general education integration must be a long-term commitment. The reform of the middle school entrance examination system and general vocational diversion seems more like neglect and compromise regarding the unsolved issues within the educational system and the allocation of educational resources. Naturally, these measures cannot fundamentally improve the situation.

Scholars abroad and some research on vocational education policies in foreign countries have recognized the issues early on and have prioritized studies to promote the coordinated development of general and vocational education effectively. In the eyes of most European scholars, vocational and technical education holds a unique position.

Vocational and technical secondary education provides individuals with training in specific fields or professions, knowledge, technical skills, and abilities to prepare them directly for the labor market. Completing vocational and technical secondary education should imply the acquisition of vocational or technical qualifications that *meet labor market demands. Therefore, the education system should emphasize the rational integration of general and vocational education, ensuring the stable development of the vocational education system* [13].

How to rationalize the general and vocational education systems so that education equips students with practical skills for the workforce without feeling abrupt and disoriented after sudden streamlining is an area where we can learn and draw inspiration from foreign education policies. We will also focus on this critical aspect for research and analysis.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Questions

Guangdong Province was the first to implement the middle school entrance examination reform system in 2022. The documentary Implementation Opinions of the Education Department of Guangdong Province on Further Promoting the Reform of the High School Stage Examination and Enrollment System explicitly states the need to improve enrollment methods for high school entrance examinations, strengthen admissions to secondary vocational schools, and promote vocational and technical education. According to statistics, in 2023, 120,000 candidates participated in the Guangdong Province middle school entrance examination, but only approximately 110,000 of them applied for regular high schools. The immediate result of this policy is a significant decrease in the failure rate of top-tier and ordinary schools, which implies increased difficulty in third-round admissions or, in other words, heightened overall competition pressure. As a practical consequence of the policy, parents and students employ various means to raise their scores to avoid attending vocational schools. Looking at the results, this policy has somewhat alleviated the enrollment pressure on high schools. However, contrary to the policies initial objectives, it has inadvertently increased students' academic stress and mental burdens. Therefore, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1) Why is this policy unable to fundamentally resolve the issue?
2) What are the feasibility of alternative solutions?
3) What are the solutions that are suitable for China's national conditions?

3.2. Research Framework

Carol Bacchi is a political scientist known for developing the WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be?) method, a policy analysis approach. This method explores how policy issues are constructed and represented, revealing power relationships and underlying assumptions [14-15]. Here is a brief overview of Carol Bacchi's WPR method:

1) Core Idea of WPR: The WPR method challenges the notion that policy issues are objective and highlights their construction through specific articulations and interpretations. Social, cultural, and political influences shape people's understanding of issues and their preferred solutions.

2) Examining the Representation of Policy Issues: The WPR method focuses on analyzing how problems are represented in policy texts, including policy documents, declarations, speeches, and media reports. Researchers explore how problems are defined, described, and explained.

3) Uncovering Power Relationships: The WPR method highlights power relationships within policy representations. Researchers examine authoritative voices, credible sources, and how power-holders shape the representation of problems. This helps reveal power dynamics in the policy-making process.

4) Implicit Assumptions of Problems: The WPR method calls for examining the implicit assumptions within problem representations. Problem representations often contain specific assumptions and presuppositions that influence policy formulation and implementation. Uncovering these assumptions helps understand the underlying thought processes behind policies.

5) Critical Analysis: The WPR method encourages critical thinking to challenge power structures and assumptions within problem representations. Researchers can raise questions, explore alternative problem representations, and assess their impact on different groups.

In summary, Carol Bacchi's WPR method emphasizes the socially constructed nature of policy issues, highlighting power relationships and implicit assumptions within problem representations. By analyzing how problems are framed, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the political and power dynamics in the policy-making process, and how these dynamics shape policy formulation and implementation. This approach helps reveal potential biases and power inequalities within the policy-making process.

3.3. Research Method

In addition to conducting a literature review and textual analysis, this study included interviews with administrators from secondary vocational schools. In this case, the interviewee is the Grade Director of Shenzhen First Vocational and Technical College. The research aims to gather the interviewee's perspective as a practitioner on the general vocational diversion policy in the context of middle school entrance examinations. The study sought to understand her views, experiences, and any recommendations she might have regarding the procedure. By analyzing her perspective, the research aimed to gain insights into the general public's perceptions of the policy and its impact on vocational colleges and students.

4. Research Finding

4.1. Policy Objective Analysis

The core objective of the general vocational diversion policy was to redirect certain students away from the intense competition of the middle school entrance examination. The aim was to enable students to choose an educational path that best aligned with their interests and abilities, ultimately reducing their academic burden. However, the actual outcomes have slightly deviated from these expectations. The study has reached different conclusions through interviews with vocational and technical education practitioners. During these interviews, respondents primarily addressed three key questions:

4.1.1. Views on the General Vocational Diversion Policy

The interviewee believes that the original intention behind the general vocational diversion policy is commendable. This policy represents a significant exploration in the field of education, with the potential to cater to students' individual needs and cultivate vocational and technical education talents. However, it is vital to acknowledge the challenges in implementing this reform, particularly in overcoming existing biases among parents and students towards vocational schools. Continuous assessment and optimization of this policy and efforts to address core issues are essential to ensure that it genuinely benefits the future development of a wide range of middle school students.

4.1.2. Specific Effects of Policy Implementation

The interviewee mentioned that there have been changes in enrollment patterns since implementing the policy. Schools now admit students who may not have previously chosen vocational high schools. These students include those genuinely interested in vocational education and those "diverted" to vocational schools based on their middle school exam results. Some forcefully redirected students may hold biases against vocational education and feel rejected, affecting their attitudes and emotional states toward their studies. Additionally, students with average or below-average grades may become disheartened and develop a negative approach to their studies due to the enforcement of the policy. In summary, the new policy has presented several challenges, leading vocational and technical education practitioners to reconsider how to provide higher-quality vocational education.

4.1.3. Recommendations for the General Vocational Diversion Policy

Introducing the concept of vocational education or vocational education courses early in students' learning journeys can help them develop their interests and better understand their future career paths. At the same time, it is necessary to improve parental education, as many parents may have biases against vocational education. Schools and educational authorities should raise parents' awareness about the importance of vocational education to gain more support for students' choices.

Based on the interview results, it is clear that this policy alone cannot fully solve the issue. Implementing radical methods can artificially create inequalities and diminish students' enthusiasm for learning. However, as mentioned earlier, the problem policymakers identified is that most Chinese

students and parents are not inclined to enroll in vocational and technical colleges. Therefore, compulsory measures were adopted to supply talent to vocational and technical positions, using a "50-50 diversion" approach as a one-size-fits-all solution to address the countries vocational and technical skill shortage. However, this policy merely addresses the symptoms rather than the underlying issues within the education system.

4.2. Issues Faced by the Policy

China's education reform policies continuously aim for innovation and adjustments, especially in vocational and technical education. However, when observing the real-world outcomes of policy implementation, we must face that vocational and technical education policies have largely failed to achieve the expected results.

Compared to vocational and general education diversion models in foreign countries, China's educational diversion *practices demonstrate three key issues: uniformity, one-sidedness, and a one-size-fits-all approach* [16].

The policy lacks a diversified development framework, making it challenging to meet the diverse development needs of talents. Additionally, it struggles to address the impact of unequal distribution of educational resources. This one-time choice in lifelong education decisions may not adequately address practical challenges. Ultimately, the root cause lies in the policy's failure to align with core issues.

4.2.1. Challenges in the Development of Vocational and Technical Education

China's vocational education system needs improvement, and the unequal distribution of educational resources poses challenges for developing vocational and technical education. However, implementing the general vocational separation policy in Guangdong Province may not consider the situation.

Currently, there is a contradiction between ideals and reality in the education division of Guangdong Province. While there is a rough balance in the quantity of general-vocational separation, there is a severe structural imbalance. This imbalance significantly affects the healthy development of vocational education, restricting the overall improvement of human capital quality in Guangdong Province. This situation is not conducive to transforming the province's economy and society [5].

The issue is that numerical equality does not equate to fairness, as there is a fundamental gap in quality and resources between general and vocational education in China. Vocational-technical schools in China have evident shortcomings, as their teaching methods and materials often lag behind the pace of social and technological development. This means that the knowledge and skills students acquire may become outdated or not aligned with current industry demands.

Furthermore, vocational-technical schools face significant funding, faculty, and facilities limitations compared to general high schools and universities. The uneven distribution of educational resources makes it challenging for vocational-technical schools to offer the same high-quality conditions as other schools [5].

These limitations result in vocational-technical schools struggling to provide students with a high-quality education, leading to a lack of reputation and appeal. Students who are compelled to choose vocational high schools may have reservations and distrust towards their schools, affecting their enthusiasm for studies and hindering their learning and development potential. This negative mindset may even cause them to give up prematurely, missing the opportunity to discover and nurture their talents.

Moreover, graduates from vocational-technical schools often face difficulties transitioning from school to the workforce. The limited cooperation between schools and enterprises makes it challenging for students to gain real internship opportunities, hindering their entry into the job market. Compared to students from general high schools and universities, vocational high school students struggle to compete in the same field and lack practical experience to apply their knowledge in real-world situations.

In essence, the proposal for separation aims to allow students who excel in practical skills or face difficulties in essential theoretical learning to enter the vocational education field and develop specialized skills. However, in recent years, accepting vocational education has become synonymous with separating and *labeling "learning-disabled students" without much choice. The quality of vocational education is not guaranteed, leading parents and students to show alienated attitudes towards this division* [2].

If vocational-technical education cannot guarantee essential quality, it becomes challenging to expect mandatory separation to be readily accepted by most parents and students.

4.2.2. Obstacles Caused by Traditional Societal Beliefs

The second issue stems from the influence of traditional Chinese educational and societal beliefs on the decisions made by parents and students. In contemporary Chinese society, the prevailing viewpoint is that regular high school and university education provide children with more advantages and a better future than vocational-technical schools.

In our society, education is still predominantly based on academic qualifications. In most areas, the admission scores for vocational schools are lower than those for regular high schools. This has created a stereotype that vocational education is lower quality, considered lower quality, or second-rate. While this perception has some truth, it is largely misunderstood or biased [17].

Additionally, traditional Confucian beliefs prioritize intellectual labor over physical labor, resulting in scholars and intellectuals holding the highest status in the traditional Confucian social hierarchy. This cultural influence leads many parents and students, even if they are interested in a specific technical field, to be influenced by these traditional beliefs and consequently overlook the opportunities offered by vocational-technical education.

Furthermore, China is transitioning from an industry heavily reliant on labor-intensive manufacturing to increasingly dependent on technology. This economic decision reflects the evolving global industrial structure and continuous technological advancements. As a result, many traditional jobs that rely on a large labor force may disappear, while new positions require workers with higher-level skills and technical knowledge. This urgent need for vocational-technical talents highlights the importance of cultivating such skills. However, the uncertainty and pressure brought about by this transition have led to broader societal anxiety. People are concerned about finding stable employment in this new economic environment and being able to support their families. This personal anxiety reflects society's overall concerns and uncertainties about the future.

In an era of significant societal uncertainty, people tend to adopt a conservative perspective and prefer traditional regular high school education, which is more stable. However, based on a "one-size-fits-all" approach, the universal separation policy fails to address public beliefs in this context effectively.

The diversion policy has a positive starting point as it can provide students who may not excel academically with skills to earn a living in society. However, for the diverted students, their middle school education often does not help them determine their desired careers or understand their areas of expertise. Instead, it primarily focuses on exam-oriented education aimed at avoiding being streamed. The immense competitive pressure can significantly impact students' values and motivation if they fail the high school entrance exam and are forced to enter vocational high schools. This undermines the goal of cultivating technical talent. According to [2], the separation and diversion policies carry a coercive implication and lead to society's disdain for students in vocational schools. While the fifty percent cutoff line may seem fair, it still creates distinctions between students, and vocational school students are often perceived as inferior to regular high school students. Consequently, many students and parents view the diversion policy as a form of forced interference, leading to a bleak future after the high school entrance exam.

In the broader societal context of China, blue-collar workers are generally regarded as having lower social status than white-collar workers. This value system is deeply ingrained in the social and familial environment. Even though blue-collar workers in many third and fourth-tier cities can earn a substantial income, there is a societal preference for pursuing white-collar professions. Family and

social environments shape these societal and occupational values and are difficult to change solely through school education. The fundamental issue lies in the societal acceptance of educational levels and awareness of students' capabilities. Prevailing societal values suggest that vocational high schools cannot offer a bright future for children but rather prepare them for demanding blue-collar jobs. As a result, vocational high schools are consistently the least favored choice in China's educational landscape and are not considered equal competitors to regular high schools. This forced diversion policy creates a crisis for many parents and students, leading to increased competition to avoid being streamed into vocational high schools. Additionally, if students lack interest in technical fields, even if they complete their studies, they may struggle to find suitable employment opportunities in society. Moreover, popular areas within vocational high schools can become oversaturated with students, while less popular fields may lack interest.

4.3. Feasibility Analysis of Alternative Solutions

Vocational high schools should be seen as a potential choice for national development rather than a necessity. Therefore, the key to addressing the problem lies in enhancing the competitiveness of vocational high schools compared to regular high schools and changing society's biased perception of vocational and technical education. To tackle these issues, we have examined various approaches taken by European countries, based on research from relevant literature and reports.

Firstly, Switzerland's vocational and educational training (VET) system is worth highlighting. It is not just a vocational education model but also a philosophy of education that enjoys social recognition. Unlike common stereotypes about vocational education, Switzerland's VET system showcases the broad prospects and limitless possibilities of vocational training. In Switzerland, the choice after primary education is no longer limited to traditional academic pathways. More than two-thirds of Swiss adolescents opt for the VET system, not because they cannot attend university, but because VET offers a more practical and future-oriented learning path. Each student entering the VET system signs a training contract with a company, typically lasting three to four years. This ensures that students gain practical hands-on experience and provides them with stable career prospects.

Moreover, with over 230 vocational training courses available, students can choose a development path that aligns with their interests and abilities. The most notable aspect of the VET system is that it does not mark the end of a student's educational journey. VET offers diverse pathways for further education and development. Graduates of VET programs can choose to pursue higher vocational education and training courses (PET), which provide employment opportunities similar to those available to university graduates. They can also qualify for university preparatory schools, paving the way for entry into the academic realm of universities [18]. Switzerland's VET system provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers in China, emphasizing the importance of enhancing the substance of vocational education and transforming societal perceptions to recognize it as an equal and valuable educational choice.

Secondly, Germany's efforts to align vocational education with business needs are also worth emulating. Germany follows a "dual system" (Duale Ausbildung) of vocational education, which combines theoretical learning with practical work experience. This type of vocational education is typically carried out through collaboration between schools and companies. Students acquire theoretical knowledge at school and gain valuable work experience in companies. This model ensures that students acquire theoretical knowledge and apply what they have learned in realistic work settings. There is an explicit training curriculum for each profession, ensuring that all students receive training of the same quality [16].

In contrast, Chinese vocational education schools exhibit a significant disparity in the quality of education, leading to internal competition within vocational schools, similar to regular high schools. Graduates from junior high school may mindlessly follow mainstream perceptions and choose more popular professions due to their lack of awareness, as not every job offers stable development prospects.

Most importantly, there is a difference in societal perception. In Germany, vocational education is not seen as a secondary choice but as an excellent starting point to acquire professional skills and embark on a successful career. However, for many Chinese parents, entering vocational high schools after failing the entrance examination is often viewed as the beginning of failure. Therefore, transforming vocational education from a secondary option into an equally competitive one is crucial for addressing educational equality in China. While other countries' approaches may not entirely apply to China's education system and employment environment due to different national contexts, they provide valuable guidance for our consideration.

4.4. Solutions Suitable for China's National Conditions

Firstly, the Chinese education system requires comprehensive reform to integrate general and vocational education. This reform should aim to overcome biases against vocational and technical education.

Given the education environment in China, integrating general and vocational education is likely to be the future direction of education. The demand for skills and knowledge is evolving, and a comprehensive education system reform is needed to adapt to these changes. General and vocational education should be organically integrated and coexist harmoniously rather than being seen as opposing or divisive. Modern education aims to cultivate adaptable and high-quality talent, so the focus should be on integrating general and vocational education rather than separating them [12].

Integrating general and vocational education is essential to address the "skills gap" in various industries where recent graduates lack the necessary skills. The first step towards achieving this integration is curriculum integration, where vocational skills-related courses can be introduced alongside cultural classes during high school. To further enhance students' practical experience, educational authorities should collaborate with schools and local businesses to provide internship opportunities for students.

To differentiate degrees obtained from public high schools and universities, technical colleges should adopt independent indicators that measure the quality of the education provided. This will help reduce comparability and increase students' pride in their chosen field of study.

By prioritizing integrating general and vocational education and providing students with practical experiences, we can bridge the skills gap and equip them with the necessary skills to thrive in the workforce.

In addition to cultural education, general high schools should introduce vocational skills courses related to the job market. For example, physics courses could incorporate learning about modern machinery and electronic technology. The focus from primary school to high school should be on comprehensive education without neglecting traditional subjects. Students can develop foundational knowledge and interest in these areas by gradually introducing vocational and technical matters. This approach helps students discover their interests and areas of expertise. In high school, students can choose schools based on their interests and strengths for further in-depth learning. Close collaboration between educational authorities, schools, and local businesses is crucial to providing students with practical internship and training opportunities, allowing them to apply what they have learned to actual work and establish connections with potential employers.

The education system's reform also involves redefining technical colleges' status. By differentiating them from general high schools and universities and providing specific evaluation criteria and certifications, students can take incredible pride and feel a sense of belonging in choosing technical career paths. It is essential to recognize the unique value of every profession and skill. Technical workers are vital in providing critical infrastructure and services, and their work is equally important as any other profession. Comprehensive education from the basic education stage is crucial, as it helps students identify their direction and interests early on, preparing them for future learning and careers while fostering innovative spirit and critical thinking.

Furthermore, it is necessary to challenge societal biases against vocational schools and technical workers. Systemic reforms should aim to change the perception that places vocational and technical

professionals as "inferior." The education system must promote a complete understanding of societal needs and the importance of vocational and technical talent, allowing everyone to take pride in their work and choices.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1. Conclusion

This article examines China's policy on diverting students to secondary vocational education and draws the following research conclusions:

1) China's vocational and technical education system faces challenges. Issues like unequal resource allocation, low educational quality, and a lack of school reputation impact students' motivation and career opportunities.

2) Traditional education beliefs limit vocational and technical education. Parents and students are more inclined towards general high school and university education due to societal views. Changing these beliefs requires significant societal changes.

3) Educational opportunities are affected by socioeconomic status. Affluent families have more resources, while economically disadvantaged families may choose vocational education. This worsens educational inequality and requires better policies.

To address these issues, China needs educational system reform, a shift in societal perceptions, and equitable resource distribution. This will ensure equal educational opportunities and better prospects for all students.

In China, vocational and technical education is underdeveloped, lacking competitiveness and attractiveness. It is crucial to correct societal perceptions and build a positive image for the industry. The separation policy in the middle school entrance examination reform is not suitable and a more gradual approach should integrate vocational and general education. This will foster the development of modern vocational talents, shift societal perceptions, and ensure resource allocation.

While the general vocational diversion policy in China has changed enrollment patterns, there are challenges such as biases against vocational education, negative attitudes towards studies, and limitations in resources and quality. Alternative solutions from Switzerland and Germany provide valuable insights for China's education reform, including enhancing the competitiveness of vocational high schools and integrating general and vocational education.

5.2. Discussion

5.2.1. The impact of unequal distribution of social resources

A persistent challenge identified in research is the unequal allocation of resources, particularly in the field of education. In China, this imbalance in educational resources has led to vocational and technical schools lacking the same level of teaching staff quality, infrastructure, and comprehensive systems as regular schools. As a result, these institutions struggle to attract students and provide an education that equips them with the necessary skills for today's job market.

Furthermore, the vocational and technical industry receives fewer resources compared to other sectors, resulting in lower salary levels and a severe shortage of talent. Additionally, the uneven distribution of educational resources within Guangdong Province leads to disparities in the effort and time that students from different counties and cities must invest in the middle school entrance examination (Zhongkao).

Implementing one-size-fits-all reform policies can further burden students, compelling them to seek additional private tutoring. Therefore, promoting the equitable distribution of social resources is essential for effectively addressing most educational challenges.

The current separation policy in the middle school entrance examination (Zhongkao) reform, which does not address resource allocation, is unlikely to yield satisfactory results. Ensuring fair resource distribution in the future is a pressing issue that requires careful consideration.

5.2.2. Challenges brought by the wealth gap

Beyond the middle school entrance examination (Zhongkao), affluent families can afford to pay high fees for tutoring and training to ensure their children's admission to prestigious high schools or universities. This situation may exacerbate educational inequality because a family's economic status still, to some extent, determines a child's educational opportunities. The differential allocation of educational resources in this manner further intensifies educational inequality in society. To a certain degree, family economic status has become the "threshold" for determining a child's educational opportunities. Children from affluent families can accumulate a more prosperous academic and holistic background through additional external resources such as expensive tutoring, experienced private tutors, various talents, and specialized training.

In contrast, children from economically disadvantaged families often struggle to access such opportunities. The intention of the middle school entrance examination (Zhongkao) diversion system was to better cater to the needs of various students and offer them more freedom of choice. However, this system might force children from financially disadvantaged families into a "path" rather than allowing them to choose. For them, diversion may no longer be an option but a passive destiny. Ultimately, this system may become a means for the affluent to pursue better educational resources, while children from poorer families may be compelled to choose more practical livelihoods. Therefore, the middle school entrance examination (Zhongkao) reform, particularly the separation policy, may not be the optimal solution to the current situation in Guangdong Province. We need to analyze specific issues and formulate more targeted and pragmatic solutions.

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