Analysis of the Problems Existing in Rural Vocational Education in Huai'an City under the Strategy of Rural Revitalization

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Abstract
This article conducts an in-depth analysis of the current development status and core issues of rural vocational education in Huai'an City under the context of the rural revitalization strategy. The study points out that talent revitalization is the key to rural revitalization, and rural vocational education bears the special mission of cultivating "agriculture, rural areas, and farmers" talents. However, rural vocational education in Huai'an City faces several prominent problems in talent cultivation, such as imbalance in supply and demand structure, outdated teaching content, weak practical innovation ability of students, homogenized professional settings, shortage of dual-qualified teachers, inadequate policy guarantees and funding investment, and backward training facilities. The underlying reasons for these problems lie in the imperfect policy system, poor departmental coordination, incomplete funding guarantee mechanism, unclear school positioning, lagging teaching reform, and the absence of school-enterprise cooperation mechanism. This study aims to identify the problems in the reform and development process of rural vocational education in Huai'an City and other similar regions, providing a reference for subsequent measures to solve these problems.

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1. Introduction

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China historically proposed the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy. This is not only an inevitable requirement for resolving the main social contradictions in the new era, achieving the "two centenary goals" and realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation, but also a brand-new depiction and precise positioning of the historical position and strategic status of "agriculture, rural areas and farmers" work. This strategy sets the overall requirements of "prosperous industries, livable environment, civilized customs, effective governance and prosperous life", aiming to promote the comprehensive upgrading of agriculture, the comprehensive progress of rural areas and the all-round development of farmers, reshape the relationship between urban and rural areas, and follow the path of socialist rural revitalization with Chinese characteristics [1]. In this grand strategic narrative, talent revitalization is placed at the core and foundation position, and it is the key engine driving the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas. It is obvious that if there is a lack of a high-quality talent team, the prosperity of industries will lack intellectual support, and the goals of livable environment, civilized customs, effective governance and prosperous life will also be difficult to achieve. Therefore, how to effectively cultivate a "agriculture, rural areas and farmers" work team that understands agriculture, loves rural areas and farmers, especially new professional farmers and technical skills talents who can root in rural areas and serve rural areas, has become one of the decisive factors for the smooth implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.

Huaian City is located in the central-northern part of Jiangsu Province and is the core area of the Jianghuai Ecological Economic Zone. It is also a traditional agricultural city. Its unique geographical location, abundant agricultural resources, and profound historical and cultural heritage provide exceptional conditions for the development of modern agriculture and characteristic rural industries. In recent years, Huaian City has seized the opportunity of the rural revitalization strategy, vigorously developing characteristic agriculture represented by crayfish and high-quality rice, actively cultivating new industries such as rural tourism and rural e-commerce, and achieving remarkable results. However, in contrast to this booming industrial trend, the problem of a shortage of rural talents in Huaian City has become increasingly prominent, especially the lack of high-quality skilled talents who are proficient in modern agricultural technology and good at management. This has become the main bottleneck restricting the further upgrading of its rural industries. Against this backdrop, rural vocational education in Huaian City is highly expected, and its development status directly affects the implementation effect of the local rural revitalization strategy. Nevertheless, in the field of rural vocational education in Huaian City, a series of explorations have been carried out and certain achievements have been made. However, there are still many issues that do not align with the requirements of the rural revitalization strategy in terms of the talent cultivation model, professional curriculum setting, teacher team building, and the depth of school-enterprise cooperation. The current practical problems, such as weak appeal of agricultural-related majors, disconnection between teaching content and industrial technology, incomplete production-education integration mechanism, and insufficient social service function, urgently require systematic investigation and research to reveal their current situation, analyze their roots, and propose scientific and feasible optimization countermeasures. Therefore, this study selects Huaian City's rural vocational education under the rural revitalization strategy as the research object, to deeply explore its existing problems and countermeasures, which not only has important practical urgency but also has far-reaching strategic significance for promoting regional economic and social coordinated development [2].

This research aims to systematically explore the current development status, core issues, and underlying causes of rural vocational education in Huai'an City under the context of the rural revitalization strategy. The significance of this research lies mainly in both theoretical and practical aspects. From a theoretical perspective, this study is expected to enrich and deepen the theoretical framework in the intersection of rural revitalization and vocational education. From a practical standpoint, the outcomes of this research are intended to provide direct decision-making references and practical guidance for the reform and development of rural vocational education in Huai'an City and other similar regions.

2. The Imbalance in the structure of talent supply, with insufficient students majoring in agriculture-related fields

Under the grand framework of the rural revitalization strategy, the rural industries in Huai'an City are undergoing a profound transformation, shifting from traditional agriculture and animal husbandry to modern agriculture, agricultural product deep processing, rural tourism, leisure and health care, rural e-commerce, etc., integrating multiple business models. This transformation no longer requires simple manual laborers but urgently demands a large number of multi-skilled talents with modern agricultural technologies, management capabilities, and innovative spirit, such as agricultural professional managers, smart agricultural technicians, agricultural product brand marketers, rural tourism planners, etc. However, the survey results clearly reveal that the supply of talents in rural vocational education in Huai'an City is structurally imbalanced with this demand. The most obvious manifestation is that the professional structure of talent cultivation does not match the industrial demand structure. The survey data shows that among all vocational colleges in the city, the number of pure agricultural-related majors is only 12.1% of the total, while over 60% of the professional resources are concentrated in traditional fields such as manufacturing and information technology. This professional layout itself has caused a shortage of talent supply for "agriculture". The deeper problem lies in the continuous decline in the attractiveness of agricultural-related majors, resulting in a severe shortage of students. Although 67.2% of the students in the survey sample come from rural households, they should be the natural source of talent for agricultural-related majors, but the proportion of students choosing to study agricultural-related majors is only 14.8%. This "rural children not studying agriculture" phenomenon has led to the general difficulty in enrolling students, low enrollment rate, and shrinking student scale in agricultural-related majors. Some schools have even had to suspend or reduce the scale of agricultural-related majors due to the inability to recruit enough students for many years, forming a vicious cycle.

3. The Teaching content and methods are outdated, and students' practical and innovative abilities are weak

Another prominent manifestation of the disconnection between talent cultivation and demand lies in the "quality" aspect [3]. That is, although graduates possess certain theoretical knowledge, their knowledge structure, practical abilities, and innovative qualities are far from meeting the actual requirements of modern rural industry positions. This issue is mainly reflected in outdated teaching content and methods, resulting in generally weak practical innovation abilities among students. The "outdated nature" of teaching content is a problem commonly reported by enterprises and students. A survey shows that over 68% of teachers admit that the update cycle of textbooks exceeds three years, which is a fatal problem in the rapidly evolving modern agriculture sector. The course content fails to keep up with the new trends in modern agricultural technology and rural industry development. For instance, cutting-edge knowledge and skills such as agricultural Internet of Things, big data analysis, drone crop protection, agricultural product live marketing, and rural homestay operation are either missing or only presented as superficial elective content, not systematically incorporated into core courses. This leads to a huge "knowledge gap" between what students learn at school and what they actually use in the industry. In enterprise feedback, up to 72.4% of the respondents believe that graduates have "weak practical hands-on abilities", and 65.8% believe that they "lack understanding of modern agricultural technologies", which are the direct consequences of this problem.

4. Students' ability to apply their knowledge and innovate is weak

The "traditionality" of teaching methods further exacerbates the disconnection between theory and practice. In many rural vocational schools, classroom teaching still predominantly follows the traditional "instructive" model centered on teachers and textbooks, placing excessive emphasis on the imparting of theoretical knowledge while neglecting the cultivation of students' practical abilities and problem-solving skills [4]. The practical teaching component not only has an insufficient proportion of class hours (averaging 28.4%), but also has poor quality. Many schools' on-campus training bases have outdated equipment and backward technology, unable to simulate real production environments and processes. For instance, in a case, the horticulture technology training greenhouse of a certain school still uses the most primitive manual watering and curtain rolling methods. Students' internships in such an environment are unable to come into contact with the automatic drip irrigation, temperature and humidity automatic control, and other technologies widely used in modern agriculture. Off-campus internship placements often remain superficial and students are often assigned to simple repetitive positions by enterprises as cheap labor, lacking systematic and targeted skills guidance and job rotation training. This "paper-based discussion" teaching model naturally produces students who are overly ambitious but lack practical skills, adaptability, and innovation ability to meet the requirements of enterprises. In a survey of graduates, when asked about their greatest gains during their studies, the proportion choosing "theoretical knowledge" was much higher than those choosing "practical skills" and "innovative thinking", which indirectly confirmed the deviation of the teaching model.

5. The Professional settings are overly uniform, and they do not closely align with the local industrial characteristics

The professional setting is the "first checkpoint" for vocational education to align with industrial demands. Its scientificity and accuracy directly determine the effectiveness of talent cultivation. In this regard, there are serious structural problems in rural vocational education in Huai'an City, mainly manifested as the homogenization tendency of professional settings and the detachment from local industrial characteristics. The investigation found that various vocational colleges within the Huai'an City have a significant convergence in professional settings, lacking the awareness of differentiated development and distinctive education. Whether it is a national-level demonstration school or an ordinary school, their professional catalogues are often filled with a batch of "all-purpose" general-purpose majors such as mechatronics, numerical control technology, computer application, and accounting computerization. Although these majors have a wide market demand, they also lead to intense student competition among schools and the repeated construction of educational resources, failing to form their own brands and advantages. What is more serious is that this homogenized professional layout has occupied valuable resources that should have been used to develop specialized agricultural-related majors. School administrators generally stated in interviews that it is easier to recruit teachers for general-purpose majors, the training equipment is relatively standardized, and student employment seems to be easier. However, when it comes to agricultural-related majors, schools face multiple difficulties such as high investment, difficult recruitment of teachers, enrollment difficulties, and management difficulties, resulting in a lack of internal driving force for developing agricultural-related majors. This educational approach directly leads to the failure of professional settings to fully meet the development needs of regional characteristic agriculture and emerging rural industries in Huai'an City. There is a "two-layered" phenomenon between the talent supply and the local economic development needs. As Huai'an City is the "China Shrimp Farming Capital" and an important high-quality rice-producing area, it has formed a complete industrial chain covering breeding, breeding/production, processing, logistics, catering, and tourism centered around these two characteristic industries. On this industrial chain, there are numerous specialized and professional talent shortages, such as efficient ecological breeding technicians, agricultural product intensive processing technicians, brand planning and marketing specialists, e-commerce live-streaming operation specialists, and dragon shrimp-themed catering management talents. However, in the surveyed vocational schools, hardly any school has set up specialized and systematic characteristic majors or professional groups around these local signature industries. The existing related majors in aquaculture and food processing, etc., have mostly universal course content and lack customized teaching modules for the special processes and market demands of shrimp farming or high-quality rice industries. Similarly, in response to the rise of rural tourism and homestay economy, the tourism management major of schools has failed to timely adjust its direction and develop courses focusing on rural tourism planning, homestay design and operation, and rural cultural experience project development, resulting in talents trained being unable to meet the needs of upgrading rural tourism. This professional setting "silence" has greatly reduced the engine effect of rural vocational education in serving local economic development.

6. Shortage of Dual-Qualified Teachers

Teachers are the decisive factor for the quality of vocational education. The level of the "dual-qualified" teaching staff directly affects whether the talent cultivation can meet the demands of the industry [5]. A survey shows that rural vocational schools in Huai'an City are facing a dual predicament of a serious shortage in quantity and an unreasonable internal structure of the "dual-qualified" teaching staff. The shortage in quantity is the primary problem. Data shows that the proportion of "dual-qualified" teachers in vocational colleges in Huai'an City among professional teachers is only 48.3%, and it is even as low as 35.1% in agricultural-related majors. This means that more than half of the professional teachers, especially nearly two-thirds of the agricultural-related teachers, do not have the legally required "dual-qualified" qualifications. Behind this data lies the reality that a large number of professional teaching tasks are undertaken by "theoretical" teachers who lack practical experience in enterprises. These teachers may be able to clearly explain theoretical knowledge from textbooks, but when facing specific problems in production practice, they often feel inadequate and unable to provide effective practical guidance for students. What is more worrying is the issue of the "value" of "dual-qualified" teachers? Among the only teachers who have the qualifications, the proportion of those who truly have long-

term and systematic work experience in first-line enterprises is extremely low (only 24.6%). Most of their practical experience comes from short-term inspections or certification training, and their understanding of the cutting-edge technologies and process flows in the industry is very limited. This kind of "paper-based" "dual-qualified" teachers is difficult to truly undertake the responsibility of cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents. The unreasonable structure further exacerbates the severity of the problem. Firstly, there is an imbalance in the age structure, with the overall teaching staff tending to be elderly, with more than 40% of teachers over 45 years old. There is also a shortage of young backbone teachers who can lead the technological trend and are full of innovative vitality. Secondly, there is a mismatch between the knowledge structure and the demands of the industry. With the rise of new industries such as smart agriculture and rural e-commerce, the industry urgently needs talents who can master skills such as big data, Internet of Things, and new media marketing. However, there are very few teachers in the school's teaching staff who possess these new knowledge and skills, resulting in serious obstacles in the establishment of related majors and the development of courses, creating an awkward situation where "the industry has demands, but the school cannot offer them". Finally, the source structure is single. The vast majority of the current teachers are recruited directly from ordinary universities, lacking effective channels and incentive mechanisms for introducing high-skilled experts and skilled workers from industry and enterprises. This single "academy-based" source makes the practical genes of the entire teaching staff inherently insufficient, making it difficult to introduce "living water" from the industry into the classroom.

7. Insufficient Policy Support and Inadequate Funding Investment

A favorable policy environment and adequate financial support are the fundamental prerequisites for the healthy development of rural vocational education. However, from the subjective perception and objective reality of the survey results, the support system in this field in Huai'an City is still not perfect, and the policy's precision and the guarantee of financial resources are both insufficient. In terms of policy support, although the national and provincial levels have issued a series of macro policy documents on developing vocational education and serving rural revitalization, at the municipal level, there is a lack of a specific and operational special support policy system tailored to rural vocational education. School administrators and teachers interviewed generally reported that the existing policies are "big talk but little action", mostly consisting of directional calls and lacking practical implementation rules that can solve problems. Specifically, in terms of encouraging enterprises to participate in school-enterprise cooperation, the policy proposed tax incentives as a guiding direction, but enterprises generally felt unclear and inconvenient about how to identify, how to deduct, and what the operation process was, resulting in the policy being "empty and ineffective". In terms of stabilizing the teaching staff for agricultural-related majors, even though there were documents proposing to provide special allowances, the standards were how to determine, where the funds came from, often had no clear follow-up, making it difficult for the policy to be implemented. This "floating" state of the policy has made rural vocational education difficult to obtain substantive preferential treatment and support in key links such as enrollment, employment, teaching staff, land use, and school-enterprise cooperation. In terms of financial support, the problem is even more prominent. On one hand, it is reflected in the relatively insufficient financial investment. Although the overall investment in vocational education has increased in recent years, the per-student public fiscal budget education funds for rural vocational schools are still lower than those for ordinary high schools. Especially in the current situation where the operating costs of agricultural-related majors are much higher than those of ordinary liberal arts majors (such as the need to invest a large amount of funds in building training bases and purchasing consumables), the existing financial allocation standards are difficult to meet the high-quality development needs of these majors. On the other hand, there is a lack of special funds and instability. The operation and development of schools rely heavily on the per-student allocation, and the channels for special funds for construction, curriculum reform, teacher training, and upgrading of training bases are not smooth, often requiring temporary project applications to obtain, lacking a stable and sustainable growth mechanism of investment. This "wait, rely, and ask" financial model makes schools unable to make long-term and systematic development plans and greatly restricts their autonomy in running the school. In the survey, up to 78.1% of agricultural-related teachers believed that the training equipment was severely insufficient or outdated, which is the most direct consequence of the lack of financial support.

8. Outdated Training Facilities

Teaching facilities and training bases constitute the "hardware" foundation of vocational education, especially rural vocational education that emphasizes practical operations. Their advancement, sufficiency, and synchronization with industries directly determine whether students can master modern vocational skills. A survey shows that rural vocational schools in Huai'an City generally lag behind in this aspect and have become a serious bottleneck restricting the quality of talent cultivation. Firstly, the teaching facilities within the schools are generally outdated, and the number of training equipment is insufficient, with low technical levels. Many schools' professional training rooms are still at the stage of "one person operating while many people watch", and the number of equipment sets is far from meeting the practical teaching requirements for each student having a position. More seriously, the technical level of the equipment is seriously out of sync with the actual industry. As mentioned before, the B-ultrasound machines for animal husbandry and the greenhouses for horticulture, etc., may have technical levels that are several years or even more than a decade behind the mainstream market equipment. When students train with outdated equipment in school, when they face advanced production lines and intelligent equipment in enterprises, they will feel at a loss and the skills they have learned cannot be directly transferred and applied. This "generation gap" in hardware makes the practical teaching in schools largely inefficient or even ineffective, and cannot truly cultivate "plug-and-play" talents that enterprises need. Secondly, the construction of off-campus training bases is lagging behind, with a small number and poor quality. High-quality off-campus training bases are the key places for students to contact real workplace environments and conduct on-the-job internships. However,

the number of stable, high-quality off-campus training bases that can be cooperated with stably and truly participate in the educational process in rural vocational schools in Huai'an City is very limited. Many so-called "training bases" are merely a piece of paper agreement with enterprises, and enterprises have not invested specialized venues, equipment, and instructors for students' internships. The internships of students in these bases are often used as cheap labor, engaged in simple and repetitive auxiliary work, and it is difficult for them to receive systematic skill training and vocational cultivation. Public training bases that are jointly built by schools and enterprises and can achieve integration of production and teaching are even rarer. This lag in training base construction has deprived students of the most important carrier for practical ability cultivation, and the integration of industry and education has thus become "water without a source and wood without a root".

9. Conclusion

Based on the above research, it can be seen that rural vocational education in Huai'an City faces several prominent problems in terms of talent cultivation, including an imbalance in supply and demand structure, outdated teaching content, weak practical innovation ability of students, homogenized professional settings, shortage of dual-qualified teachers, insufficient policy support and financial investment, and backward training facilities. The underlying causes of these problems can be traced back to the macro-level policies and institutional aspects. Although both the national and local levels have issued a series of documents to support vocational education and rural revitalization, the policy system specifically targeting rural vocational education is still not complete, and there are issues of systematicness, complementarity, and operability. The existing policies are generally applicable but fail to fully consider the particularities of rural vocational education in terms of operating costs, teacher sources, student characteristics, and service orientation, resulting in a weak effect of precise policy irrigation. This research aims to identify the problems in the reform and development process of rural vocational education in Huai'an City and other similar regions, and provide references for subsequent measures to solve these problems.

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