

Original Research Article

The integration of five domains of education in higher vocational general education under the new double high plan: Realistic dilemmas and practical pathways

Shuping Ni

Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, Zhejiang, 321004, China

Abstract: Under the new round of the Double High Plan and the national strategy of building a strong education system, general education in higher vocational colleges is shifting from the parallel provision of five domains of education to their genuine integration. Using literature and policy analysis, this paper examines the theoretical basis, the policy evolution and the practical demands of integrating moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labour education in higher vocational colleges. The study finds that current practice is constrained by four structural problems, namely fragmented governance with limited teacher capacity, loosely connected curricula that lack vocational features, rigid teaching patterns with superficial use of digital technology, and narrow evaluation standards. It proposes a systematic pathway grounded in collaborative governance, curriculum reconstruction, pedagogical innovation, teacher development and evaluation reform, so that the five domains move from parallel elements to an interconnected process and from course accumulation to a synergy of values.

Keywords: new double high plan; higher vocational general education; integration of five domains of education; type education; comprehensive development

1. Introduction

China's vocational education has entered a stage of systemic quality improvement. The Outline of the Plan for Building a Strong Education Country (2024 to 2035) and the new round of the Double High Plan both call for a sound system supporting the all round development of students in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labour education^[1]. Higher vocational colleges, a key hub of the modern vocational education system, need to connect national strategies, industrial upgrading and the comprehensive development of students. General education is a crucial field for fostering virtue through education, and the degree of integration directly affects the quality of technical and skilled talent.

In practice, many colleges have established complete course and activity systems covering the five domains, yet offering all of them does not mean they are connected. When different departments administer the five domains, courses follow a single disciplinary logic, and practical activities stay separate from classroom teaching, students face independent educational blocks and struggle to develop comprehensive judgment and action capacity^[2]. Existing research discusses this integration largely in basic and general higher education, with insufficient attention to the type attributes of vocational education. This paper therefore reconsiders its internal logic, practical obstacles and reform paths.

2. The logic of integrating the five domains in higher vocational general education

2.1. The theoretical basis of networked knowledge

Traditional curriculum organization takes disciplinary boundaries as its framework, so knowledge is divided into units and the five domains are treated as unrelated tasks. Connectivism holds that learning is the formation of networks and that knowledge is distributed across learners, technologies and social environments^[3]. The five domains are therefore not parallel sets of course content but nodes within a network of comprehensive literacy. What matters is building connections among the nodes through problems and practice, so that judgment, application, physical development, aesthetic experience and labour

practice support one another.

2.2. From parallel provision to genuine integration

Integrating the five domains does not negate their parallel provision; it deepens the idea of all round development. Parallel provision solves whether each domain exists and whether they are balanced, correcting the overemphasis on intellectual education. Integration answers whether they can form a joint force, because adding courses and activities produces crowded timetables, scattered resources and competition^[4]. Integration strengthens mutual penetration while recognizing distinct functions. Moral education provides value orientation, intellectual education grounds problem solving, physical education safeguards health, aesthetic education enhances perception, and labour education turns values into practice.

2.3. The practical demand of comprehensive career development

New quality productive forces require skilled talent to do more than perform one operation. The digital and green transformation of industries makes work tasks more complex, so talent needs capacity for learning transfer, problem solving, collaboration and sustainable development^[5]. The aim of higher vocational education thus extends from one post to adaptation to change. General education is irreplaceable in this process. Moral education shapes career responsibility, intellectual education supports knowledge transfer, physical education relates to adaptation at work, aesthetic education influences craft quality, and labour education connects with professional spirit.

Figure 1 presents the analytical framework of this study. The five domains surround comprehensive vocational competence as interconnected nodes, and four mechanisms sustain their integration. The next two sections examine the obstacles and pathways that correspond to them.

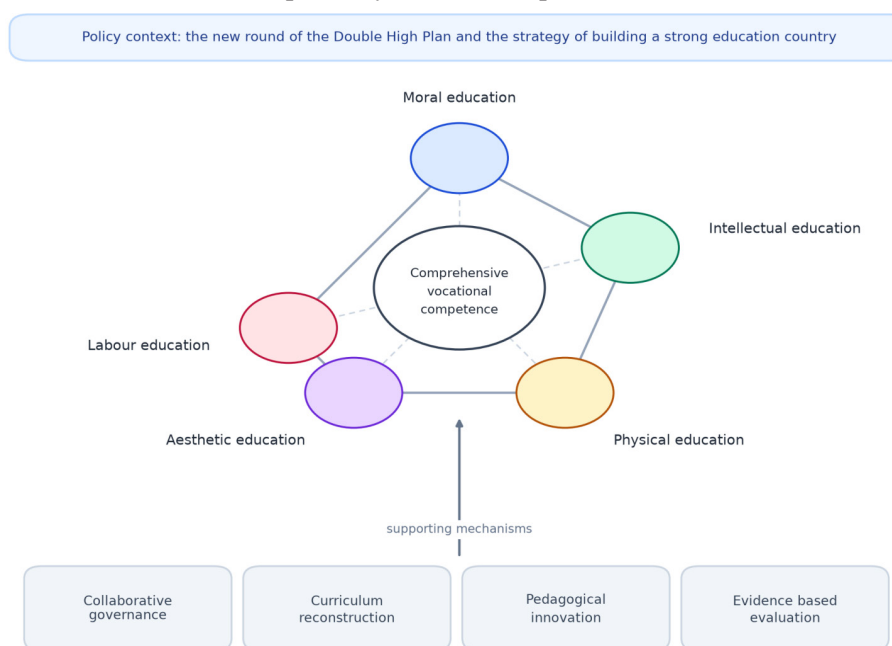


Figure 1. A framework for integrating the five domains of education in higher vocational general education.

3. Realistic dilemmas in the integration of the five domains

3.1. Governance dilemmas: Weak collaboration and limited capacity

Departmental division of labour is clear but collaborative mechanisms are weak. Ideological and political education, public basic courses, physical education, aesthetic education and labour education belong to different units, each with its own standards. Without unified objectives and cross departmental deliberation, the five domains remain formally juxtaposed, and course arrangement and evaluation can hardly be connected^[6]. Teacher capacity also lags behind reform requirements. Integration asks teachers to move beyond one discipline and to turn links between course content, occupational ethics and the spirit of labour into learnable tasks, yet general education teachers know little about occupational posts and specialized teachers seldom express general literacy.

3.2. Curriculum dilemmas: Loose connection and weak type characteristics

Curriculum is the direct carrier of integration, yet many general courses are complete in variety and weak in connection. Courses for the five domains are built separately, with little link among their objectives, and a boundary remains between general and professional courses. Students may earn credits without understanding how abilities from different courses act together at work, so integration degenerates. Since vocational education faces the world of work, general education should be distinctly occupational, yet many courses emphasize general knowledge and neglect technological change and teamwork. When aesthetic education stops at appreciating artworks and labour education records activity frequency^[7], general education and professional training become separate matters.

3.3. Pedagogical dilemmas: Rigid patterns and superficial use of technology

Integration must occur through teaching. Some general education classrooms still centre on teacher exposition and memorization, and tasks follow a single disciplinary logic. Such classrooms transmit knowledge but seldom help students connect values and action. Norms and aesthetic judgment rarely become stable choices at the level of conceptual explanation. Digital technology offers conditions for breaking classroom boundaries, yet entering the classroom does not equal empowerment. Many platforms still serve resource distribution and grade recording, with weak support for process data and collaboration^[8]. Artificial intelligence and virtual simulation create formalism if they only display resources instead of serving teaching objectives.

3.4. Evaluation dilemmas: Vague standards and narrow functions

Evaluation determines what students learn and how teachers teach. Integration is comprehensive and partly implicit, because value judgment, aesthetic experience and labour quality can be observed only in authentic tasks. Reliance on final examinations and single activity scores fails to reflect comprehensive literacy, and colleges without stable observation points can hardly improve teaching^[9]. Evaluation agents and methods are also single. In labour education, valuing quantity over quality substitutes frequency and hours for labour literacy itself. Integration needs to attend to student growth relative to starting points and to long term trends. When evaluation serves only score certification, it can hardly support diagnosis or feedback.

4. Practical pathways for the integration of the five domains

4.1. Aligning the five domains with student growth tasks

Integration should begin not with how many hours each domain receives but with what students need at each stage. Junior students need rule awareness, study habits and collective adjustment, while core professional study turns to responsibility, cooperation and labour norms. Approaching practice, students face ethics, pressure, technical risk and client communication. Colleges can map the key tasks of three years and embed the five domains in different stages rather than requiring every course to carry five objectives at once.

4.2. Linking general and professional education through real problems

The value of general education lies not in knowledge parallel to professional study but in the value questions behind technical work. Rather than organizing content by discipline, colleges can build learning around problem domains in the world of work. A problem domain is an authentic problem that no single kind of knowledge can solve and that involves judgment, value weighing and responsibility, such as privacy in intelligent technology or safety in production. Such problems are inherently cross domain, so they create connections more easily than artificial assembly^[3].

4.3. Promoting the transfer from knowing to doing through outcome tasks

Integration stays at the level of ideas partly because results are not easily seen. Rather than increasing lecturing, colleges can turn part of general learning into outcome tasks with genuine use, letting students demonstrate literacy through works. Observing and designing an accessible campus requires investigation, expression and responsibility. Outcome tasks need not be large, but students must carry the process from discovering problems to revising and reflecting on results. Mature outcomes can enter public evaluation through exhibition or comment^[4].

4.4. Broadening educational agents through learning communities

Integration should not assume that one teacher must be competent in everything. Occupational understanding grows from sustained contact with different roles, so the educational unit can expand from one teacher to a stable learning community. Besides the course teacher, it may include mentors, counsellors, enterprise masters and alumni who offer different perspectives^[10]. Enterprise masters explain workplace constraints, alumni supplement the transition to work, and teachers transform experience into reflective content. Such participation emphasizes continuity rather than lectures, and the teacher becomes a designer of tasks.

4.5. Driving continuous improvement with growth evidence

Difficulty in evaluating integration does not mean a complicated indicator system is needed. Instead of designing a large instrument, colleges can start from evidence produced in real learning and build growth portfolios. A portfolio may contain project works and peer feedback, yet it should focus on core questions. Whether a student can adjust opinions in disagreement, justify choices when quality conflicts with efficiency, and form labour habits are the questions that matter. Evaluation then shifts from giving a conclusion to helping students see their own change^[9].

5. Conclusion

The integration of the five domains in higher vocational general education is not a simple addition of five kinds of content. Under the new round of the Double High Plan it means a systematic reconstruction of governance, curriculum structure, teaching settings, teacher capacity and evaluation mechanisms around the complete development of technical and skilled talent. Its core lies in breaking down the boundaries within general education as well as those between general and professional education, so that value shaping, knowledge construction, physical and mental development, aesthetic experience and labour practice permeate one another in real learning processes. Only when integration is translated into workable institutional arrangements, learnable curricular tasks, sustainable teacher collaboration and feedback oriented evaluation can reform avoid remaining at the level of concepts. Future research needs to test these proposals in different professional groups and institutional settings, and to compare student development evidence systematically before and after reform.

About the author

Shuping Ni (1975.02-), female, Han ethnicity, from Jinhua, Zhejiang; education: Graduate degree; title: Professor; research interests: Vocational education / general education.

References

- [1] Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council. Outline of the Plan for Building a Strong Education Country (2024-2035)[Z]. 2025.
- [2] Ning B T. The generative logic and promotion path of the integration of five domains of education[J]. Educational Research, 2021(4): 50-57.
- [3] Siemens G. Connectivism: A learning theory for the digital age[J]. International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning, 2005, 2(1): 3-10.
- [4] Li Z T. Methodological reflections on promoting high quality development of basic education through the integration of five domains of education[J]. Journal of the Chinese Society of Education, 2022(3): 1-7.
- [5] State Council. Report on the Work of the Government[R]. 2025.
- [6] General Office of the CPC Central Committee and General Office of the State Council. Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Modern Vocational Education System[Z]. 2022.
- [7] Tan C B. Conceptual analysis and value clarification of labour education[J]. Journal of Educational Studies, 2020(6): 3-11.
- [8] Ministry of Education and Eight Other Departments. Opinions on Accelerating the Digitalization of Education[Z]. 2025.
- [9] Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council. Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Evaluation in the New Era[Z]. 2020.
- [10] Lave J, Wenger E. Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation[M]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.