

# A Review of Research Progress in the Implementation of Geriatric Education Policies

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**Abstract:** China has now entered a deeply aging society, and under the pressure of growing aging, geriatric education in China has gradually become a major issue in social governance. Based on the implementation of geriatric education policy, this paper analyzes China's geriatric education policy in terms of policy content, problems and countermeasures using the literature research method. It points out that the current geriatric education policy is characterized by one-sided curriculum content due to welfare orientation, multiple management due to poorly defined division of authority and responsibility, resource supply due to insufficient venues and teams, and insufficient participation of social forces due to economic pressures and legitimacy crises. The corresponding countermeasures are given to solve the above problems. It provides a systematic review and reference for subsequent related research.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

China has entered an aging society for more than 20 years, the degree of aging has deepened with the development, and in 2022, it will produce the first negative growth in more than 60 years, and some research predicts that the growth rate of China's aging will peak in 2022-2036. Population aging will become the basic national condition of China in the long run, and some scholars even claim that the demographic pressure has become a major pressure in the governance of China's social problems (Qiao, 2024). To cope with the pressure of population aging, the Chinese government has issued a series of documents to alleviate the demographic pressure. Among them, the Plan for the Development of Elderly Education (2016-2020), the first policy document on elderly education, shows that the Chinese government has elevated elderly education to the level of national will as one of the strategies for positive aging. In the 1990s, the Chinese government started to develop gerontological education at the social level, but due to multiple administrations and the increase in the elderly population, there has been an imbalance between the supply of gerontological education resources and the demand of the elderly population for a long time (Ding, Chen, Xiang, He, 2019; Zhong, 2023). With the rise of network governance, "grassroots" organizations, and other

third sectors in China, the Chinese government has also noticed the role played by social forces in the governance of social issues, which is highlighted in policy documents, such as the Chinese government's launching of the "National Medium and Long-Term For example, the Chinese government has introduced policies such as the "Outline of the National Medium-and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)" and the "Development Plan for Elderly Education (2016-2020)," which call for paying full attention to and encouraging the participation of social forces, such as communities and enterprises, in China's supply system of resources for geriatric education. However, many scholars have pointed out that due to the low degree of resource integration and insufficient financial support, the current Chinese social forces do not have a strong willingness to participate in the cause of supplying resources and constructing the system of geriatric education. (Wu, 2020; Zhou, 2021; Sun, Yao, Ye, 2022).

This paper mainly analyzes the problems in the implementation of China's geriatric education policy and puts forward countermeasure suggestions, using the literature analysis method to carry out analysis in the perspective of literature research, policy content, policy problems and suggestions, mainly focusing on the four levels of China's geriatric education policy: curriculum content design, multiple management, resource supply and social force participation, and

giving corresponding policy suggestions for the causes of the problems to provide relevant references for the subsequent research.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the existing literature, scholars mainly focus on studying the current situation of geriatric education policies and analyzing international geriatric education experiences, while some scholars pay attention to the design concept, policy content or policy changes of geriatric education policies. In terms of the current situation of geriatric education policy, scholars mainly focus on three aspects of research: policy objectives, supply of educational resources, and division of power and responsibility. In terms of policy objectives, Zhou Cuiping points out that the current Chinese geriatric education policy objective is to provide a curriculum system that “focuses on joyful education” to the elderly population (Zhou, 2021). Scholars such as Wu Jie, and Sun Lixin (2020) reflect on the educational objectives and believe that the value orientation of geriatric education should be changed from “joyful education”, ‘elderly service’ and ‘social welfare’ to ‘positive education’ and the development and realization of the self-worth of the elderly. In terms of studying the insufficient supply of educational resources, Ding Qianmei (2019) believes that geriatric education resources should be integrated. Zhou Cuiping (2021) believes that social forces should be actively encouraged to.

## 3 CONTENT OF THE POLICY ON EDUCATION FOR THE ELDERLY

### 3.1 Policy Objectives

Since the 1980s, the goals of China's geriatric education policy have been progressively developed and sublimated with the deepening of the understanding of geriatric education. China's gerontological education policy originated from the work of old age and retirement treatment for retired old cadres, mainly for the purpose of serving retired old cadres and enriching their retirement life, with a strong welfare orientation. In the 1990s, the deepening of globalization and the United Nations' focus on the issue of aging influenced the goals of China's gerontological education policy, which was

no longer limited to retired cadres and turned its attention to the protection of the rights and interests of the entire elderly population of China in the field of education, and to this end, the Chinese government enacted the “Seven-year Development Outline of China's Work on the Elderly (1994-2000)” and the “Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly”. To this end, the Chinese government has promulgated the Seven-Year Development Programme for the Elderly in China (1994-2000), the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly, and other legal and policy documents, pointing out that the work of education for the elderly should be centered on realizing the right of the elderly to learn, safeguarding the right of the elderly to receive an education, and continuously improving their quality. After China entered an ageing society in 2000, the Chinese Government successively issued the Circular on Doing a Good Job in Elderly Education, the Outline of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan for the Development of the Elderly Career in China (2006-2010), and other policies, mainly aimed at improving the network of gerontological education in a variety of schooling modes, with senior citizens' universities as the main focus, and vigorously promoting gerontological education so that it is more accessible to the elderly. The main purpose of these policies is to improve the network of education for the elderly, mainly in the form of universities for the elderly, and to vigorously promote education for the elderly on a national scale. Since the 1910s, as the national situation of aging deepened and the Chinese government's awareness of gerontological education increased, the Chinese government, in an effort to further promote gerontological education and at the same time improve the quality of the gerontological education supply system, has progressively issued the Modernization of China's Education 2035, the Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Plan for Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020) and the Plan for the Development of Elderly Education (2016-2020), incorporating elderly education into the strategic level of lifelong learning and national development. Among them, the Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) calls for strengthening the development of continuing education with a focus on strengthening human resources capacity building, improving the institutional mechanism for continuing education and building a system for continuing education, and constructing a lifelong education system. The Plan for

the Development of Elderly Education (2016-2020) calls for the formation of a pattern of elderly education around five levels: institutional mechanism, resource supply, development path, support services and sustainability.

### 3.2 Policy Objects

Place China's gerontological education policy objects change with the evolution of its policy objectives. In the 1980s, policies aimed at serving retired cadres mainly included retired cadres and relevant departments involved in gerontological education, and policy documents during this period were ambiguous about the policy objects, giving only a general plan without a clear definition; in the 1990s, gerontological education policies were subject to international influences, and the policy objects were further defined. In the 1990s, the policy on education for the elderly was influenced by the international community, and the scope of the policy object was further expanded, i.e., it was expanded to cover all groups of elderly people on the basis of the previous one, and universities for the elderly and radio and television broadcasting were clearly defined as important forms of education for the elderly, and at the same time, the main departments responsible for the education for the elderly were identified. After the year 2000, the targets of the policy on education for the elderly were basically defined, and the policy for this period, while continuing the existing policy, also emphasized the role of social forces in the policy that could not be ignored. So far, the government management and production of public services, social acceptance of management, citizens benefit from the policy object system is basically finalized.

## 4 THE PROBLEMS OF THE ELDERLY EDUCATION POLICY

### 4.1 One-Sided Curriculum Content

The value orientation of China's geriatric education policy is limited by the social welfare perspective. In the policy text, although there have been laws and policy documents written to protect the rights and interests of the elderly in education, so that it has risen to the level of national will, however, in the subsequent relevant documents do not specifically state that the rights and interests of the elderly are guaranteed, but more to improve the life of the elderly, pay attention to their physical and mental

health as the value of the focus of the elderly education policy, for example, in the Notice on the Issuance of Elderly Education Development Plan (2016-2020) issued by the General Office of the State Council. For example, in the Circular of the General Office of the State Council on the Issuance of the Development Plan for Elderly Education (2016-2020), it is stated that "education on ideology and morality should be actively carried out to help the elderly improve their quality of life and realize the value of their lives". In the implementation of the policy, the curriculum design of geriatric education is user-oriented, favoring "happy education", and the content of the curriculum is concentrated in the life section, such as the use of smartphones, and the recreation section, such as the teaching of singing, and the design of the curriculum related to the realization of value and personal growth, such as the redevelopment of the work skills of the elderly, and the reexploration of personal values are missing. The design of courses on value realization and personal growth, such as redevelopment of work skills and re-exploration of personal values, is missing.

### 4.2 Multi-Tiered Management

The implementation of China's gerontological education policy suffers from the drawbacks of multiple administrations. Elderly education in China is mainly provided by senior citizen universities, community-based senior citizen education sites, enterprise-run for-profit organizations, and senior citizen education institutions set up by social forces, which are managed by the Bureau for the Elderly, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, and other departments. Although it is emphasized in the policy documents that the above departments have the main responsibility in the implementation of the gerontological education policy, the policy documents do not provide a clear definition of the respective responsibilities of each department (Wu, 2020). Due to the lack of a lead department, the policy implementation department lacks vertical coordination and planning, and thus lacks foresight in strategic planning. The "compartmentalized" inter-governmental relationship has led to a lack of willingness to cooperate horizontally, resulting in a lack of integration of resources, such as duplication of resources. The lack of a clear definition of departmental responsibilities in the policy documents leads to ambiguity in the implementation of the policy, and the overlapping of departmental functions provides a reason for the relevant departments to pass the buck to each other. Based on the field research on

geriatric education in Sichuan, Ding Qianmei (2019) pointed out the disadvantages of this kind of management mode, such as shirking responsibilities, lack of development strategy, low resource integration and restricted budget.

### 4.3 Insufficient Supply of Resources

The implementation of China's gerontological education policy is characterized by an insufficient supply of resources. At present, there is an imbalance between the demand for geriatric education and the supply of resources for geriatric education, and it is difficult for older people to enroll in courses offered by universities for the elderly.

The main reason for this is the insufficient supply of venues and teachers. At present, most of the elderly education institutions lack suitable venues, and most of the venues are converted on the basis of other original buildings, such as office buildings, which are not able to adapt well to the venues required by the elderly education, and at the same time, the financial pressure is also greater. In addition, due to population density, the problem of venue supply is even more serious in the city to carry out elderly education. At the same time, in the construction of teachers, the existing teachers have a low level of specialization, and cannot respond well to the requirements of high-quality courses in elderly education, which is also one of the main reasons why the elderly education courses have been stuck in "happy education" for a long time and cannot be transformed. The supply of personnel is also a major dilemma. Currently, the number of full-time teachers in the gerontological education faculty is small, and the recruitment of volunteers is difficult because of compensation and other problems.

### 4.4 Insufficient Participation of Social Forces

The implementation of China's geriatric education policy is characterized by insufficient participation of social forces. In the relevant policy documents issued by the Chinese government, most of the main bodies providing resources for elderly education are government departments, and this single structure of supplying educational resources has increased the government's financial burden and management costs in the field of elderly education. At the same time, the public sector has the problem of low responsiveness in the production of public services and products. M. Tam's research shows that network governance and

social force participation play a significant role in elderly education. The introduction of social organizations, enterprises and other social forces to participate in the provision of resources and services for elderly education not only helps the government to reduce the financial burden and management costs, but also enhances the responsiveness to the needs of citizens. Although it is mentioned in the Notice of the General Office of the State Council on the Issuance of the Development Plan for Elderly Education (2016-2020) and other documents that social forces should be encouraged to actively participate in the construction of gerontological education, there are no relevant documents or systems that provide clear incentives. There are two dilemmas in the implementation of the policy on the participation of social forces in geriatric education. First, the course pricing dilemma. At present, the pricing of senior education programs in China is divided into two categories: low price and high price. The low price is represented by the government-founded universities for the elderly, and behind the low-priced courses there are government subsidies to support them, and the more people participate in such low-priced courses, the greater the pressure on financial subsidies (Wu et al., 2021). At the same time, compared with the government-founded universities for the elderly, the social forces are at a disadvantage in applying for subsidies, and it is even more difficult to get financial subsidies sufficient to cover the operating costs. High-priced courses, on the other hand, are represented by for-profit organizations established by enterprises, backed by high value-added add-on products such as services. Such courses can only reach an audience in economically developed regions, and it is difficult to promote them on a large scale across the country. Social forces have neither the advantage of government subsidies nor sufficient audience for high value-added courses, and there is a dilemma in pricing the courses. In addition, there is the dilemma of public recognition. Chinese citizens currently do not have a high degree of recognition for social organizations created by social forces, and the existence of many "government-run" associations undoubtedly puts social organizations at a disadvantage in winning public recognition, leading the public to prefer "government-run" associations to social organizations when enrolling in senior citizens' courses. The result is that the public prefers "government-run" associations to social organizations when enrolling in courses for the elderly.



## 5 SUGGESTIONS FOR ELDERLY EDUCATION POLICY

### 5.1 Deepen the Content Based on Existing Courses

To promote the development of personal values and job skills training for the elderly as an outline, deepen the content based on existing courses. Currently, older people's participation in gerontological education-related programs is mostly based on the need to enrich and entertain their retirement life, and gerontological education programs are limited in content in response to this need. Seth Matthew Fishman points out that the work-oriented and leisure-oriented learning behaviors of older learners can be transformed into each other. In conjunction with the current motivation for older adults' educational needs, a large-scale, systematic rollout of curricula that focus on personal value development and job skills training may result in low participation among older adults. It is possible to build on existing programs, and it is possible to dedicate a portion of class time to personal value development or job skills training on a time basis. It is also possible to infiltrate the value development component into the existing curriculum to guide and inspire participants to realize their personal values. Further development can also be made to the existing course content, for example, the hand embroidery course can add a certain business content to develop the trainees' work skills. Such progressive improvement responds to public demand on the one hand, and deepens the content of the elderly education program on the other.

### 5.2 Enhancing Party Building Leadership

Strengthen the role of party leadership in the implementation of gerontological education policy and give full play to the advantages of vertical leadership. After the policy on education for the elderly was expanded to cover all elderly people in China, the implementation of the policy has long been faced with multiple administrations due to ambiguous definitions of authority and responsibility. The “compartmentalized” nature of the policy has led to a lack of willingness to cooperate at the horizontal level. Wu Jie (2020) points out that the reason for the rapid and stable development of senior universities in the early years was the clear definition of responsibilities of the Bureau of Older Persons' Affairs for senior universities, which further clarifies

the necessity of the division of authority and responsibility among sectors in the implementation of policies on education for the elderly (Wu, 2020). Based on the theory of holistic governance, Yue Jun (2022) suggests the establishment of a “high-level promotion” mechanism with the Communist Party of China (CPC) as the core leader. Adopting the CPC-led mechanism can fully integrate the roles of various departments in the implementation of gerontological education policies, and eliminate the problem of defining departmental responsibilities in the complex network of intergovernmental relations and overlapping departmental responsibilities in the process of policy implementation.

### 5.3 Developing Community Resources

Developing and tapping community resources. In response to the problem of insufficient personnel supply, communities are rich in human resources due to their high-density populations. Relying on communities, if community human resources can be fully developed during the implementation of gerontological education policies, the problem of personnel supply can be effectively responded to. For example, the community can set up incentives such as volunteer points to encourage residents to participate in volunteer services in senior universities. Retired elderly people in the community can be both the recipients of the elderly education policy, due to the rich working experience and a variety of work experience such as retired teachers, retired cadres, but also can be volunteers and participants in the elderly education policy. As for the issue of venue supply, although the community does not have existing teaching venues suitable for senior education, it can still introduce educational institutions such as universities for the elderly through programs such as “Community Partners” to provide them with venue support.

### 5.4 Enhance Legitimacy

Through the government's evaluation of excellence, benign operation increases the legitimacy of citizens' recognition of social forces. Citizens' lack of legitimacy towards institutions such as universities for the elderly established by social forces stems from the lack of an “official” identity. In order to encourage the participation of social forces, although the legitimacy crisis can be solved by directly assigning the above institutions to government management, this initiative not only faces the problem of which department to assign the responsibility to, but also

increases the management cost of the department, and at the same time, some of the institutions are not properly operated, which also undermines the authority of the government. The government can hold regular evaluations and award certificates to senior education institutions run by social forces. Recognition from the government encourages and motivates the active participation of social forces on the one hand, and strengthens competition among social forces on the other hand, forcing them to produce higher quality and more responsive elderly education services and products. Most importantly, the government's recognition can resolve the legitimacy of social forces and enhance citizens' recognition of their participation.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This paper reviews and analyzes the progress of the implementation of gerontological education policies, and analyzes and elaborates on the four existing problems: one-sided curriculum, multiple administrations, insufficient supply of resources, and insufficient participation of social forces. The one-sidedness of the curriculum mainly stems from the response to the needs of leisure-oriented citizens, while failing to design the curriculum in terms of the personal value and work skills of the elderly. Multiple management mainly stems from the policy's unclear definition of the division of powers and responsibilities among management bodies, which makes each government administration do its own thing. Insufficient supply of resources is mainly due to the pressure of space and staff in the daily management of educational institutions. Insufficient participation of social forces is mainly due to the financial pressure brought by the pricing of courses and the identity crisis brought by the lack of legitimacy. At the same time, the changes of policy objectives and policy targets in the course of China's gerontological education policy are elucidated, and the main problems in the implementation of China's gerontological education policy are summarized and solutions are given, which provide references for the subsequent research on gerontological education. This paper takes the national perspective as the research perspective to analyze the implementation of gerontological education policy as a whole, and thus omits the regional particularities and differences in the implementation of gerontological education policy in different places. Subsequent research can be based on the policy practice in different regions to conduct more geographically-specific research, and

to summarize and develop the experiences and shortcomings of the implementation of gerontological education policy in different regions.

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