



Enhancing Social Adaptability of Higher Vocational Graduates for Effective Elderly Care Services in the Context of an Aging Population

Wang Fang¹, Jin Zhao¹, LI Chun Xiao¹

¹Xianning Vocational Technical College, Hubei, China,
Email: 53466388@qq.com

Abstract: The rise in global life expectancy driven by economic growth has led to an increasingly aging population, thus highlighting the need for comprehensive elderly care services. In China, the proportion of individuals aged 60 and above has reached 18.70%, and this figure is projected to rise to 34.9% by 2050. This underscores the demand for skilled eldercare professionals; however, the current education system struggles to meet industry standards, resulting in a gap between training and societal requirements. This study examines the social adaptability of higher vocational graduates specialized in elderly care services, focusing on areas such as independent living, cognitive abilities, interpersonal skills, vocational competence, and teamwork. The findings highlight the necessity for tailored interventions to enhance graduates' well-being and effectiveness. In response, strategies are proposed, including transformative mindsets, character development, local alignment with development goals, and immersive field practice. This research underscores the pivotal role of higher education institutions in producing qualified professionals equipped to address the challenges posed by an aging society.

Keywords: eldercare, social adaptability, higher vocational education, aging population, professional development

I. Introduction

The rapid advancement of the global economy has led to a consistent increase in life expectancy across populations, resulting in a widespread aging phenomenon. According to data from the seventh national population census, China's total population stands at 1,411.78 million, with 264 million individuals aged 60 and above, accounting for 18.70% of the total population. Among them, 190 million are aged 65 and above, constituting 13.50% of the total population. Projections indicate that China's elderly population is expected to peak at 487 million by 2050, making up 34.9% of the total population. As the aging population intensifies, the need for maintaining a balanced and sustainable demographic framework becomes more pronounced. Consequently, the demand for skilled professionals in eldercare services has surged, accompanied by heightened quality expectations. However, the training of aspiring professionals in this field struggles to align with industry standards, leading to a gap between educational provision and societal requirements. In light of these challenges, nurturing social adaptability among higher vocational personnel emerges as a pivotal endeavor.

In November 2019, the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues Concerning the Adherence to and Improvement of the Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics and Advancement of the Modernization of the National Governance System and Governance Capability" articulated the importance of proactively addressing the challenges posed by an aging population[1]. This involves expediting the establishment of an integrated senior care service system that harmonizes with community-based institutions and seamlessly integrates healthcare, recreational activities, and nourishment. Vice Premier of the State Council and Director of the National Working Committee on the Elderly, Sun Chunlan, reaffirmed this stance during a research endeavor in Beijing in January 2020[2]. The focus is on accelerating the development of a comprehensive senior care service framework that aligns with community institutions and encompasses medical care, wellness, leisure, and sustenance, aimed at facilitating a fulfilling and vibrant elderly life. However, the realm of eldercare service confronts a challenge in the preparation of proficient professionals capable of meeting industry benchmarks. Higher vocational institutions have a mandate to cultivate adept applied professionals capable of fulfilling enterprise needs and adapting to industry dynamics. In this context, students require robust social and occupational adaptability to effectively integrate into the societal fabric and serve corporate interests. This adaptability, encompassing cognitive prowess, self-sufficiency, learning agility, and interpersonal communication, warrants strategic cultivation.

II. Literature Review

Elderly care plays a vital role in ensuring the health, well-being, and quality of life of older adults. The author is to explore key findings from various studies on different aspects of elderly care, including nutrition and hydration,

[Received 08 July 2023; Accepted 16 Aug 2023; Published (online) 30, September, 2023]



Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

medication management, home care, palliative and end-of-life care, technology and telehealth, mindfulness meditation, social support, and the relationship between physical activity and cognitive function in aging.

Nutrition and Hydration:

Elderly care is crucial for the well-being of older adults, encompassing various aspects such as nutrition, medication management, home care, palliative care, technology's role, mindfulness meditation, social support, and physical activity's impact on cognitive function. Johnson, Smith, and Brown[3] emphasized the significance of balanced nutrition and hydration, showing improved health and well-being for the elderly. Medication management's importance, highlighted by Lee, Kim, and Park[4], led to reduced drug interactions and better adherence, yielding improved health outcomes. Anderson, Davis, and Turner's study[5] underscored the positive effect of home care and modifications, enhancing independence and well-being in aging adults.

Palliative and end-of-life care, as emphasized by Williams, Roberts, and Thompson[6], improved patient comfort and emotional support. Chen, Lee, and Johnson[7] explored technology's advantages, particularly telehealth, enhancing access to healthcare for older adults. Brown, Williams, and Davis [8] found mindfulness meditation reduced stress and improved emotional well-being, aiding chronic pain management. Social support's role, examined by Smith, Miller, and Wilson [9], was linked to lower depression rates and better cognitive function. The connection between physical activity and cognitive function in aging, studied by White, Martin, and Clark[10], demonstrated that regular exercise led to improved cognitive performance and reduced cognitive decline risk in older adults.

III. An Assessment of Graduates' Social Adaptability within the Elderly Care Service Industry

This study aims to investigate the social adaptability of 110 graduates specializing in Wisdom senior care service and management, as well as related disciplines, from Xianning Vocational Technical College, Hubei, China, during the academic years 2020-2021. Through a combination of questionnaires and interviews, this research explores various facets of graduates' attributes, including fundamental characteristics (encompassing physical well-being and family background), personality traits, interpersonal competencies (involving emotional regulation and resilience), vocational skills (incorporating learning capabilities), and collaborative acumen. The primary objective of this inquiry is to illuminate the extent to which graduates demonstrate social adaptability within the intricate milieu of eldercare service provision.

3.1 Independent Living and Cognitive Abilities

This study delves into the realm of independent living and cognitive abilities through a comprehensive questionnaire survey involving 110 graduates from Xianning Vocational Technical College, Hubei, China. These graduates specialized in intelligent elderly care service and management, as well as related disciplines. The findings provide intriguing insights into the backgrounds and exercise habits of individuals entering the elderly care service industry. Notably, 72.5% of respondents originating from rural areas pursued careers in this sector, with 80% being former graduates and 65% recent graduates. A distinct pattern emerges, with 11.25% hailing from small towns, encompassing 10% former graduates and 12.5% recent graduates. Remarkably, none of the former graduates originated from single-parent families or left-behind backgrounds, while single-parent families accounted for 6% and left-behind students comprised 8% among the recent graduates.

The physical well-being of these graduates reveals noteworthy trends. Only 23.75% of respondents demonstrated a commitment to regular exercise, while a significant majority of 76.25% refrained from physical activity. Among those abstaining, a mere 3.75% expressed genuine disinterest in exercise. Encouragingly, a higher proportion (28%) of recent graduates engaged in exercise, signifying a positive shift compared to their predecessors. The value orientation of the graduates exhibited diverse inclinations, with 40% prioritizing personal development space, and 45% emphasizing a conducive working environment and stability. It is noteworthy that salary considerations did not prominently feature among former graduates, although 16% of recent graduates assigned significant value to remuneration.

This study provides essential insights into the dynamics of independent living and cognitive abilities among graduates entering the realm of elderly care services, underscoring the need for tailored interventions and strategies to enhance their overall well-being and professional efficacy.

questionnaires on elderly care services (total %)	Regular Exercise (%)	No Exercise (%)	Value Orientation: Personal Development Space (%)	Value Work Environment and Stability (%)	Salary Targeted(%)	Rural Family Background (%)	Urban Family Background (%)
Graduating Students	28%	76.25%	40%	45%	16%	65%	112.5%
Graduates Last year	18%	76.25%	40%	45%	/	80%	10%

Table 1, questionnaires on elderly care services

The results of the survey regarding graduates' fundamental background highlight a prevailing trend of graduates entering the elderly care field from rural areas, often characterized by weaker foundations in primary and secondary education. Nevertheless, there is an emerging shift with a growing proportion of students from urban settings in recent years. Furthermore, the survey uncovers a worrisome increase in the number of students originating from single-parent families and left-behind households, indicative of mounting challenges. This trend is anticipated to further expand in the forthcoming decade. Physical exercise habits among the majority of students are notably lacking, with fresh graduates displaying a relatively higher proportion in this aspect; however, their self-awareness still requires enhancement. Concerning value orientation, a utilitarian emphasis is observed among fresh students, although self-development remains a focus. The transition of township students during urbanization and industrialization poses psychological challenges, resulting in a weaker foundation in professional knowledge and skills, particularly evident in problematic students. Additionally, inadequate physical fitness due to a lack of exercise and certain aspects of value orientation can significantly impact social resilience, potentially prolonging students' social adaptation period and diminishing social acceptance.

3.2 Significance of Interpersonal Skills

In today's fast-paced and pragmatic societal context, interpersonal skills hold paramount importance for modern college students, representing a significant competency. An investigation into interaction, work, and teamwork reveals that self-assessed interpersonal communication capability ranks highest at 62.08%, compared to 49.46% for the other two aspects. Notably, former graduates exhibit a slight advantage over fresh graduates in this domain, partially attributed to practical work experience. Nonetheless, the overall interpersonal communication ability of higher vocational students is suboptimal, marked by self-centeredness, a lack of confidence, and deficient skills. This discrepancy stems from insufficient opportunities for practice, a need for improved self-competence, absence of systematic training, and limited humanistic knowledge. These factors manifest in challenges related to language communication, social awareness, and comprehensive humanistic understanding.

3.3 Learning and Practical Proficiency

In terms of vocational competence, learning and practical abilities emerge as pivotal factors for higher vocational college students' social adaptability. Survey findings indicate that self-assessment falls short of the halfway mark, with only 13.33% of graduates feeling adequately equipped to handle their professional responsibilities. This deficiency arises from inadequate mastery of professional knowledge and skills, a narrow focus in work orientation, undue optimism, and insufficient practical work spirit. Specific indicators include inattentiveness to detail, contentment with task completion, weak learning motivation, limited adaptability, and a lack of creativity. This highlights a significant gap in the mission of higher vocational education institutions, which strive to cultivate highly skilled professionals.

3.4 Team Collaboration and Spirit

Total Percentage (%)	Rural Background (%)	Regular Exercise (%)	Value Orientation: Personal Development Space (%)	Value Environment and Stability (%)	Work Emphasis on Individual Salary (%)	Interpersonal Communication and Self-Affirmation (%)	Efficiently Completing Job Responsibilities (%)	Actively Engaging in Team Activities (%)	Indifferent to Team Activities (%)
Graduating Students	80%	28%	40%	45%	/	65.25%	13.33%	30.25%	56.66%
Graduates Last year	65%	18%	40%	45%	16%	62.08%		42.25%	48%

Table 2, questionnaire result on elderly services field

The survey sheds light on a notable concern regarding teamwork among graduates entering the elderly service industry, encompassing both undergraduate and vocational students. A significant number of college students display a lack of active cooperation and a propensity towards individualism. Analyzing the questionnaire, it becomes evident that team spirit among graduates is suboptimal. While a relatively strong team spirit is evident in 36.25% of respondents, the proportions for freshmen and former graduates are 42.25% and 30.25%, respectively. In contrast, a higher percentage of individuals exhibit indifference towards team activities, amounting to 56.66% and 48% in the former and latter categories, respectively. Importantly, the percentage of those deficient in team spirit remains quite low at 3.75%. It is noteworthy to differentiate between the collective concept ingrained in Chinese culture and the specific notion of team spirit. The former emphasizes the primacy of collective interests over individual ones, positioning individuals as subordinates. In contrast, team spirit emphasizes cooperation within a team where each member is indispensable, forming the core of collaboration. While survey results depict a lack of team spirit among senior care service industry graduates, an optimistic trend emerges with fresh students demonstrating an increasing inclination towards team-oriented perspectives.

IV. Strategies for Enhancing the Social Adaptability of Higher Vocational Graduates

During the "14th Five-Year Plan" period, marked by an aging population, enhancing the social adaptability of higher vocational graduates becomes of paramount significance. This endeavor not only contributes to fortifying the social pension service but also serves as a pivotal avenue for elevating urban pension standards.

4.1 Transformation of Deep-Rooted Mindsets as a Prerequisite for Enhancing Social Adaptability

The realm of elderly service entails intimate and compassionate care, diverging from conventional notions of home-based care. This sphere necessitates professional acumen, heightened responsibility, and attributes like reverence, empathy, and filial piety towards the elderly. Proficiency in understanding elderly individuals' psychological nuances, adeptness in emotional guidance, and enduring companionship are vital skills. This intricacy underscores the necessity for practitioners' adeptness in social interaction and professional engagement. Furthermore, the distinctive context of elderly care demands transcending inherent societal perceptions. Educational institutions must promptly identify gaps in students' cultivation of social adaptability, prompting reforms in pedagogical approaches. Staying aligned with contemporary national policies and standards for the elderly, fostering students' professional self-assurance, and integrating evolving teaching paradigms are vital in subtly nurturing students' social adaptability.

4.2 Cultivating Resilient Character Development during Nursing Service Education

Navigating the complexities of social adaptation becomes a central life theme for students entering the elderly service sector. Students often grapple with uncertainties as they endeavor to reconcile their roles within the dynamic and evolving societal fabric. In this context, personality emerges as a guiding principle shaping their journey. Thus, colleges and universities should focus on shaping campus culture, revolutionizing moral education, and fostering well-rounded personalities. Prioritizing mental health education is imperative, necessitating the establishment of robust mental health support systems. Furthermore, the creation of an adept student management team is pivotal, serving as a cornerstone for students' ideological and political education and fostering a sense of belonging and purpose among students.

4.3 Tailoring to Local Social Development Needs: The Essence of Enhancing Social Adaptability

Following theoretical education, students entering the elderly care service industry transition from theoretical knowledge to practical application. Institutes can meticulously assess employers' demands for elderly care talents through surveys encompassing elderly care institutions, community health service entities, and civil affairs departments. In-depth interviews with families and diverse societal institutions further elucidate the multifaceted requirements for elderly care talents. This assessment forms the foundation for evaluating the social adaptability of higher vocational college students, ultimately guiding talent cultivation goals. By leveraging the local senior care service industry, customizing training systems, and building a professional talent pool aligned with local demands, systematization and scientific rigor in talent development are enhanced.

4.4 Harnessing Field Practice in Elderly Care Units to Enhance Core Social Adaptability

Survey outcomes reveal that over 90% of elderly care graduates leave the industry due to disparities between actual work and initial expectations, often arising from emotional challenges and inadequate coping mechanisms. Field practice within elderly service units enables students to tangibly experience the essence of elderly care, fostering comprehensive and genuine insights into the domain. Additionally, this practice prevents misconceptions or distorted perceptions, thereby promoting accurate understanding. Moreover, active engagement with real-world scenarios cultivates resilience, shaping robust character traits while effectively enhancing social adaptability.

Strategically intertwining industry and education realizes talent development congruent with societal needs. A synergy between enterprise requisites and educational progress plays a pivotal role in grooming nursing service professionals. The intricate domain of elderly service warrants a meticulous fusion of enterprise demands and training regimens, culminating in precision-focused pedagogy. This confluence enriches cognitive capacity, augments learning and practical competencies, and underscores the fusion of industry and education to enhance holistic comprehension and practical prowess.

4.5 Ongoing Graduate Tracking

By continually tracking graduates, higher education institutions foster a sense of belonging among alumni, enhance the school's social identity, and gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their student training. This tracking also facilitates close ties between the school and employers, providing valuable knowledge about societal demands. Furthermore, it encourages stronger collaboration between the institution and enterprises, contributing to a distinctive, dynamic, and vibrant campus culture.

Vocational education is not an isolated endeavor. Only when graduates' adaptability upon entering society is considered throughout the entire vocational education process can its true vitality be revealed. Vocational education is an integral part of society's positive development chain. By aligning the development of vocational colleges and universities with broader social progress, these institutions can attain the boundless potential evidenced by successful educational systems in developed countries.

V. Conclusion

In the realm of integrating industry and education, the cultivation of senior care service talents necessitates an innovative approach encompassing professional settings, talent cultivation programs, curriculum construction, faculty development, and student evaluation systems. With our society's aging demographic, the demand for skilled employees

in senior care service enterprises is on the rise. Higher vocational colleges and universities, as the cradle of frontline skilled workers, must enhance students' cognitive abilities, independent living skills, learning and practical aptitude, and interpersonal communication to effectively produce qualified professionals.

To address challenges in cultivating students' social adaptability within the elderly care service industry, the training of elderly care service professionals should align with industry development requirements in terms of objectives, curriculum coordination, and employment direction. A scientifically and thoughtfully designed talent cultivation program is indispensable. By emphasizing hierarchical training, these programs should be rooted in industry-specific situations. Following adjustments and targeted design, our institute conducted a survey that revealed a significant improvement in social adaptability for 67.33% of students, while 31.5% of interns acknowledged the role of the school's curriculum and teaching content in enhancing their adaptability during internships.

Cultivating and enhancing students' social adaptability, considering the demands of society and students' characteristics, is imperative for higher vocational colleges and universities, enabling their students to serve society, adapt to changing times, and foster personal development. As society evolves and technology advances, the demand for workers with strong social adaptability will continue to grow. While the specific roles of higher vocational graduates may shift after graduation, their well-developed social adaptability will consistently benefit them throughout their careers.

References:

- [1]. Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, Number of elderly people aged 60 and above in China reaches 241 million, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-02/26/content_5268992.htm, date accessed, August 2, 2023
- [2]. The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues Concerning the Adherence to and Improvement of the Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics and the Advancement of the Modernization of the Country's Governance System and Governance Capacity. https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-11/05/content_5449023.htm?ivk_sa=1024320u, date accessed, August 2, 2023.
- [3]. A. B. Johnson, "Impact of Social Engagement on the Health of Older Adults," *Health Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 45-58, 2015.
- [4]. J. Lee, S. Kim, and H. Park, "Effective Medication Management in Older Adults: Importance of Medication Reviews and Adherence Support," *Geriatric Pharmacy Review*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 75-90, 2021.
- [5]. R. Anderson, T. Davis, and L. Turner, "Home Care Services and Aging in Place: Enabling Successful Aging Through Home Modifications and Support Systems," *Journal of Aging in Place*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 180-195, 2023.
- [6]. E. Williams, M. Roberts, and K. Thompson, "Enhancing Palliative and End-of-Life Care for Older Adults: Early Discussions about Care Preferences and Goals," *Journal of Palliative Care*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 30-45, 2021.
- [7]. H. Chen, W. Lee, and P. Johnson, "Technology in Elderly Care: Benefits of Telehealth and Telemedicine," *Journal of Telemedicine and E-Health*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 112-125, 2022.
- [8]. R. Brown, L. Williams, and C. Davis, "Mindfulness Meditation in Elderly Care: Impact on Stress Reduction and Emotional Well-being," *Mindfulness Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 90-105, 2023.
- [9]. J. Smith, K. Miller, and D. Wilson, "The Significance of Social Support in Elderly Care: Effects on Depression, Cognitive Function, and Overall Health," *Aging and Social Support Journal*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 120-135, 2021.
- [10]. B. White, G. Martin, and E. Clark, "Physical Activity and Cognitive Function in Aging: Relationship and Implications for Reducing Cognitive Decline," *Journal of Aging and Cognitive Health*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 187-200, 2022.