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Opportunities and Strategies for the Integrated Development of Educational Publishing in the Context of the New Gaokao: Postprint

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Abstract

The reforms of the new college entrance exam in examination content, modalities, and admission mechanisms have presented numerous new challenges to teachers, students, and parents, and the publishing industry, which takes education as a crucial front and educational publishing as a vital component, should accurately grasp educational needs, identify its positioning, and clarify its strategic thinking from perspectives such as quality content supply oriented toward core competencies, subject ability diagnosis, career planning education, intelligent foreign language listening and speaking training, subject selection and class scheduling, and voluntary application guidance, leverage its own advantages to actively research and develop integrated publishing content and products, continuously enhance core capabilities for integrated development, help teachers, students, and parents solve a series of problems arising from the new college entrance exam, and achieve a dual harvest of social and economic benefits.

Full Text

Opportunities and Strategies for the Integrated Development of Educational Publishing Under the New Gaokao

Abstract: The reforms in examination content, methods, and admission mechanisms under the new Gaokao have presented numerous challenges for students, teachers, and parents. The publishing industry, which regards education as a crucial domain and educational publishing as a vital component, should accurately grasp educational demands. By leveraging its own strengths, the industry should identify its position, clarify its approach, and actively develop integrated publishing content and products from perspectives such as high-quality content supply oriented toward core competencies, diagnostic assessment of subject abilities, career planning education, intelligent foreign language listening and

speaking training, subject selection and class scheduling, and college application guidance. In doing so, it can continuously enhance its core capabilities for integrated development, help teachers, students, and parents solve a series of problems brought by the new Gaokao, and achieve both social and economic benefits.

Keywords: new Gaokao; educational publishing; integrated development

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In September 2014, the State Council issued the *Implementation Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Examination and Enrollment System*, launching a new round of Gaokao reform in China. The reformed Gaokao has brought significant changes to examination content, methods, and admission mechanisms. Upon release, the reform plan immediately presented severe challenges for students, teachers, and parents. Faced with the new Gaokao and the ensuing confusion among educators and families, the publishing industry—which holds education as a crucial domain and educational publishing as a key component—should step up to address these challenges.

1. Challenges of the New Gaokao

From the State Council's implementation opinions and subsequent provincial plans, the new Gaokao differs most notably in examination content, methods, and admission mechanisms. In terms of content, the new Gaokao focuses on core competencies, emphasizing students' ability to analyze and solve problems using acquired knowledge. Additionally, it abolishes the traditional division between liberal arts and sciences. Beyond the three mandatory subjects of Chinese, mathematics, and foreign languages, students independently select three subjects from politics, history, geography, physics, chemistry, and biology for academic proficiency tests, with scores converted into their total Gaokao results. Regarding examination methods, many regions have implemented twice-yearly foreign language tests, with some provinces also adding oral examinations. For admission mechanisms, a comprehensive evaluation system is being established, admission batches are gradually being eliminated, and the application format has shifted from "institution-first" to "major-first."

These specific reforms pose considerable challenges for students. First is the selection of proficiency test subjects. Previously, students simply chose between liberal arts and science tracks, but under the new Gaokao, candidates in the first two pilot batches must select three subjects from six or seven options, creating 20 or 35 possible combinations. The third pilot batch follows a "3+1+2" model with 12 possible combinations. This proliferation of choices

dramatically increases decision-making difficulty. Subject selection requires not only clear self-awareness of learning interests and academic performance but also preliminary career planning, as subject combinations directly affect university major options. Second is choosing pathways for advancement. The new Gaokao establishes a goal of “classified examinations, comprehensive evaluation, and diversified admission,” offering options including the unified Gaokao, independent enrollment, comprehensive evaluation-based admission, and vocational college classification tests. While providing more opportunities, this also raises decision-making complexity, requiring students to make informed choices based on thorough self-understanding. Third is completing college applications. The elimination of admission batches expands the range of available institutions but also makes it harder to distinguish their quality. The major-first approach demands deeper understanding of oneself, academic disciplines, and universities.

Teachers and school administrators also face significant pressure. In instruction, the new Gaokao’s focus on core competencies requires educators to upgrade their teaching philosophies and methods. They must guide students through the process of knowledge discovery, grasp the underlying ideas and methods beneath symbolic knowledge, and connect learning more closely with social realities to cultivate problem-analysis and problem-solving abilities—a substantial departure from previous exam-oriented approaches emphasizing memorization and test-taking techniques. In career guidance, the new selection and admission mechanisms have transformed career planning from optional to essential and urgent. Schools must offer systematic career planning courses, yet most lack foundational capacity in this area. Regarding instructional order, the new subject selection system disrupts traditional administrative class structures, making the “walking class” system necessary. Designing and adapting to this new instructional order presents fresh challenges for educators and institutions.

2. Opportunities for the Publishing Industry

Overall, the new Gaokao’s complexity has risen sharply, making it difficult for students, teachers, and schools to cope alone. Educational publishing’s mission is to serve teaching and learning. Faced with the confusion caused by the new Gaokao, educational publishers should leverage their existing content and expert advantages, adopt an integrated development approach, and develop content, products, and services that address current problems, thereby creating both social and economic benefits. Based on a comprehensive analysis of challenges and strengths, publishers can make efforts in the following areas.

2.1 High-Quality Content Supply for Core Competencies

Under the combined reforms of the new Gaokao, new curriculum standards, and new textbooks, recent Gaokao exams have featured increasingly comprehensive, applied, and contextualized questions that reflect core competency requirements. Assessing and evaluating core competencies represents the central

task of Gaokao content reform in the new era. Faced with these new concepts and requirements, frontline teachers generally feel uncertain about how to integrate core competencies into instruction and assessment, with insufficient relevant materials and training guidance. In response, educational publishers should keep pace with educational reforms, actively organize expert resources, and develop teaching guidance materials centered on subject-specific core competencies. They should design new assessment questions highlighting competency evaluation and provide ample content resources and support services for core competency-oriented teaching reforms under the new Gaokao through books, new media, online courses, teaching platforms, and training activities. This will help frontline teachers upgrade their philosophies and methods and promote students' development of core competencies across subjects.

2.2 Enhanced Subject Ability Diagnosis

Currently, publishers primarily serve high school education by providing textbooks, supplementary materials, and digital teaching resources. With advancing educational informatization and rapid development of big data and AI technologies, learning analytics can now collect and analyze student learning process data to accurately diagnose learning conditions. This technology enables students to clearly understand their learning levels and potential in various subjects, facilitating more rational subject selection decisions. It also helps students promptly identify weaknesses during learning and receive targeted resource recommendations, allowing them to focus limited energy on weak knowledge points, thereby significantly improving learning efficiency and subject competitiveness. Educational publishers should move toward intelligence: on one hand, leveraging traditional advantages to further develop systematic, high-quality content resources; on the other hand, transforming from simply providing paper and digital resources to “quality resources + learning analytics.” By offering precise, personalized learning services, publishers can help students more accurately understand their subject abilities and potential, providing scientific evidence for new Gaokao subject selection and helping students learn more efficiently to enhance competitiveness in chosen subjects.

2.3 Career Planning Education

The new Gaokao explicitly increases student choice, allowing independent selection of advancement pathways, major directions, and proficiency test subjects. “Teaching students how to choose” has become an urgent issue. Against this backdrop, career planning education has moved to the forefront of educational reform due to its crucial role in developing students' decision-making abilities. Currently, career planning education in high schools has only recently gained attention and remains a weak link. Many students lack access to systematic, scientific guidance. A survey in one pilot province revealed that existing career education lacks systematic design, with high schools universally facing difficulties such as “lack of teachers, lack of curricula, and lack of tools.” Fewer than

two-fifths of high schools have dedicated career courses. The new Gaokao is forcing high schools to strengthen career planning education, and publishers should address this problem and opportunity by organizing experts to develop systematic career planning curricula. Through “textbooks + extended resources + assessment tools,” they can help students better understand themselves, universities, majors, and society, enhancing their decision-making and career planning abilities to make optimal personal choices. Simultaneously, publishers should vigorously organize online and offline teacher training to improve educators’ career guidance capabilities and strengthen teaching staff.

2.4 Intelligent Foreign Language Listening and Speaking Training

From an examination method perspective, foreign language subjects have seen the most obvious changes under the new Gaokao. Many regions have implemented twice-yearly foreign language listening tests, with oral examinations to be added in the future. These reforms aim to, first, disperse examination pressure and break the “one exam determines everything” model, and second, guide foreign language education from exam-oriented to application-oriented approaches. While increasing test frequency disperses pressure, it also inevitably pushes students into Gaokao preparation earlier. Since the highest score is counted, most candidates will take both tests to maximize results, meaning actual learning pressure may not decrease. Moreover, emphasizing assessment of language application abilities represented by listening and speaking requires high schools to adjust teaching strategies and increase specialized class hours, while also necessitating students’ conscious, active strengthening of listening and speaking practice. With rapid advances in intelligent speech technology, human-computer dialogue through simulated situations can analyze and evaluate listening and speaking performance, promptly identifying problems. Combined with targeted training for weak points and simulated tests, this enables sufficient and efficient learning. Publishers can partner with technology companies, leverage existing author resources and teaching research advantages, and provide richer content and technical support for high school foreign language teaching reform through quality teaching content and intelligent speech evaluation technology. This offers more resources and feedback for students’ daily practice, promoting improvement in foreign language listening and speaking abilities.

2.5 Informatized Subject Selection and Class Scheduling

In recent years, as the publishing industry underwent digital transformation and upgrades and the “three connections and two platforms” initiative was implemented in education, some publishers launched digital campus products that helped many primary and secondary schools improve teaching and management informatization. Now, with the new Gaokao abolishing the arts/science division and implementing independent subject selection, the traditional fixed-class teaching model can no longer adapt. The “walking class” system has become necessary for regular high schools. Designing walking class instructional order and

reforming management models have become major challenges, yet many publishers' digital campus products lack corresponding solutions. The new Gaokao's walking class system features "flexibility, mobility, and differentiation." Class division, scheduling, and evaluation must comprehensively consider student preferences, ability levels, teacher allocation, time distribution, spatial distance, and teaching assessment—making it an extremely urgent and difficult task. Subject selection and class scheduling have become the "first rigid need" for regular high schools under the new Gaokao. Launching informatization solutions for the walking class system to help schools solve current problems can enhance publishers' digital campus product competitiveness. Publishers without digital campus products can also use this as an entry point to quickly enter the market through traditional channel advantages, creating more opportunities during product operation.

2.6 College Application Guidance

The new Gaokao system has significantly changed college applications. Candidates no longer face simple "institution parallel applications" but new parallel application formats of "institution-major groups" or "major (category) + institution." Applications must consider major factors more heavily. Additionally, with merged admission batches, the number of applications has increased from a few to several dozen. Without batch indicators to distinguish institutional quality, identification becomes particularly difficult. Faced with this situation, candidates and parents need advance preparation and thorough study to develop reasonable application plans within the short period between score release and application submission. Many publishers have previously produced application guide books, but single book formats can no longer meet needs. Candidates and parents desire more convenient, intelligent, and scientific tools. Publishers can develop digital products for this need: on one hand, using video courses and materials to help systematically learn application rules, methods, and understand universities and majors; on the other hand, using assessment and data query tools to help candidates quickly identify suitable majors and institutions.

3. Challenges and Strategies

Currently, the main players in the new Gaokao market are internet startups and training institutions. Compared with these, publishers' advantages lie in authoritative content resources, strong expert teams, and good brand image. Despite these unique strengths, publishers have obvious shortcomings in talent support, technical backing, and funding security, with weak capabilities in digital product R&D and operation, facing considerable challenges. Faced with opportunities and challenges, publishers must clarify their thinking, find the most suitable path, and strive to forge core capabilities for the integrated development era to secure a place in the vast market space created by the new Gaokao.

3.1 Identifying Advantages

Every publishing institution has unique advantages, whether in subject content, author resources, publishing fields, or sales channels. Facing the new Gaokao, publishers should first carefully analyze their strengths, starting from the core competitive advantage of “content resources” to find the optimal intersection between their advantages and new Gaokao market demands. This should serve as the entry point for developing relevant content and products. For example, publishers with advantages in primary and secondary school textbooks can develop career planning and application guidance curriculum systems and tool platform products based on textbooks, while those with supplementary material advantages can focus on subject ability diagnosis.

After analyzing advantages and entry points, publishers must also clarify their positioning—that is, identify their role. The new Gaokao creates numerous needs for students, teachers, and parents. Addressing these needs and combining them with their own advantages, publishers can provide quality content, launch tools focusing on specific needs, or even develop comprehensive teaching service platforms integrating multiple functions. Different product types involve vastly different human and capital investments. Publishers must clearly define what they can and should do based on their actual conditions: whether to focus on content provision or tool/platform development, whether to develop independently or through partnerships, and whether to take a leading or participating role. This is particularly important for small and medium-sized publishers with limited investment capacity. Only with clear positioning can limited human and financial resources be invested in their most advantageous content and products.

3.3 Content as Foundation

Content is the foundation of publishing and the basis for integrated development. From core competency teaching and assessment to career planning education, ability diagnosis, and application guidance, the numerous market demands created by the new Gaokao all require support from quality content. “Authoritative content” is people’s first impression of publishing institutions and their primary competitiveness in the internet era. Regardless of their advantages or positioning, publishers must prioritize content quality. Content resource R&D in the integrated development era requires product thinking. Publishers should not simply deliver resources or engage in traditional book publishing and supporting resource development. Instead, they should plan and implement with product thinking, focusing on actual user needs, following educational principles, selecting the most appropriate forms, and organizing the development of refined, systematic content that solves real problems, while continuously receiving market feedback and improving during content operation.

3.4 Controllable Technology

During the past decade of digital transformation and integrated development exploration, publishers have mostly adopted commissioned development for digital products. In the early stages of integrated development, this approach allowed low-cost, low-risk product exploration. However, in the long term, commissioned development suffers from high communication costs, untimely responses, difficult quality control, and high update fees, making it unsuitable for the continuous improvement and rapid iteration needs of internet products—an unsustainable model that many publishers have experienced firsthand. The root cause of this unsustainability is the lack of technical control. In the internet and publishing integration era, digital product R&D should become a core competency of publishing institutions. As the new Gaokao reform gradually expands its pilot scope, the trial space for related products is shrinking. After clarifying product strategies, publishers should abandon commissioned development models and, based on their positioning, either partner with technology companies through joint investment and shared returns, or introduce professional talent in product development, technology, and operations to build complete product teams for independent R&D and operation.

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