

The Inevitability, Main Difficulties and Countermeasures of High Quality Development of Higher Vocational Colleges in the New Era

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Abstract

Higher vocational education is the advanced stage of vocational education, which undertakes the mission of cultivating high-quality technical and skilled personnel. Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, higher vocational education has ushered in a period of policy dividend development. The country has deepened its emphasis on higher vocational education, and its development prospects are broad. Higher vocational colleges are one of the main bodies closely related to social economy, and serving regional economic and social development is their basic goal. Adhering to high-quality development direction can continuously serve social and economic development. The high-quality development of higher vocational colleges in the new era must fully understand the inevitability of high-quality development in the new era, overcome the stubborn malaria, implement and deepen the integration of industry and education, build a community of shared destiny for the integration of industry and education in higher vocational colleges, increase education investment, improve the diversified investment mechanism, improve the internal quality standard system, achieve high-quality development strategies for higher vocational colleges, and comprehensively promote high-quality development of higher vocational colleges.

Keywords: higher vocational colleges, higher vocational education, high quality development, the new era

1. Introduction

In the context of the development of the new era, China's economic situation has evolved from scale expansion to high-quality development, resulting in rapid development of industrial transformation and upgrading and industrial structure adjustment. This series of changes has also promoted the reform and development of higher vocational education, and higher vocational colleges have ushered in a new era of high-quality development. Since the implementation of the "Double High Plan", the high-quality development of higher vocational colleges in China is facing new challenges and opportunities, and has entered a new stage of connotation construction from scale expansion. It is necessary to strictly implement the high-quality development requirements under the new situation, give play to the social service function of higher vocational education, guide the development of higher vocational colleges with high quality, and provide talent support and intellectual security for the socialist modernization construction. "The 20 Principles of Vocational Education" clearly states that vocational education and general education are two different types of education, with equal importance. It is also necessary to build a number of high-level vocational colleges and professional groups with distinctive professional characteristics, which provides policy development space for the high-quality development of vocational colleges. Building high-quality vocational colleges has become the theme of the new era.

2. The Inevitability of High Quality Development of Higher Vocational Colleges in the New Era

The high-quality development of higher vocational colleges is an inevitable requirement to comply with the trend of the times, as well as an inherent requirement for their own transformation and development. Higher

vocational colleges must accelerate the process of improving quality and excellence in the context of major national development strategies, and lead the development of higher vocational education in a connotative, standardized, and high-level manner. Combining the development laws of vocational education, economic development laws, and industrial development trends, high-quality development of vocational education is an inevitable choice for higher vocational colleges.

2.1 High Quality Economic Development Leads to High Quality Development in Higher Vocational Colleges

At present, China's economic development has entered a new normal, with the speed of economic development shifting from high to medium speed, and the economic development shifting from factor scale driven primarily to innovation driven. New changes have taken place in the requirements for high-quality construction of human capital and technological progress. High quality construction in vocational colleges and universities is synchronized with high-quality economic development. The construction process of higher vocational colleges in China has undergone initial establishment, scale expansion, demonstration backbone construction, and high-quality development stages. It is an important construction decision made corresponding to different historical stages of high-quality economic development. The changes in new industries, new formats, and new technologies caused by the high-quality development of economic society require higher vocational colleges to promote economic construction with high-quality construction as the core, and cultivate high-quality technical and skilled talents with exquisite skills and craftsmanship spirit in line with the economic development trend of the new era. With the continuous optimization and transformation and upgrading of the economic structure, the speed of industrial transformation has accelerated, and the problems faced in the high-quality development stage of the economy have become more complex. Higher vocational colleges are required to be able to match a team of talents with large-scale and structured abilities and qualities. As an important component of optimizing the structure of higher education, higher vocational colleges should not only implement the task requirements of promoting high-quality development of higher vocational education in the "20 Principles of Vocational Education", but also create sustainable economic benefits for high-quality economic development, provide more higher education opportunities for new urban and rural labor, and achieve high-quality employment.

2.2 Optimizing the Structure of Human Resources Requires High Quality Development in Higher Vocational Colleges

As a large manufacturing country, China has a large gap in labor productivity compared to developed countries. The labor productivity level is only 40% of the world average, equivalent to 7.4% of the United States. There is a large gap in senior skilled workers in China, with senior skilled workers accounting for 40% of the entire industrial workforce in Japan, 50% in Germany, and only about 5% in China. "People are the most critical factor in the high-quality development of the economy. To achieve the transformation from population dividend to talent dividend, higher vocational education needs to assume responsibility." China has a small stock of senior skilled workers, which seriously hinders the improvement of productivity. It is urgent to optimize the supply structure of technical and skilled personnel and give full play to the advantages of human resources. Developed countries have formed a relatively mature development model for the cultivation and training of technical and skilled personnel. The continuous optimization of existing technical and skilled personnel teams has adapted to the continuous changes in the industry, and the newly added technical and skilled personnel teams are required to maintain continuous competitiveness based on the latest technical standards and job standards. Optimizing the structure of human resources requires the high-quality development of higher vocational colleges to inject fresh blood into it, to provide vocational skills training and upgrading to meet the needs of different levels, and to expand the team of highly skilled talents with high-quality training output, in order to improve the phenomenon of the gap in senior skilled workers in China. A sufficient number of talent reserves is the foundation for a country's development, and it is also the lifeline for high-quality development of higher vocational colleges. The transformation and upgrading of the industrial structure is closely related to the optimization of the human resource structure. Of course, skilled workers are an important support for industrial development, while the proportion of high-end skilled talents is the core figure in solving technical problems and tackling key technological issues in the key areas of industrial development. The importance of higher vocational colleges in promoting the optimization of human resource structure is self-evident, and they must improve their standing and stand firm with high-quality construction.

2.3 Upgrading Industrial Form Needs High Quality Supply from Higher Vocational Colleges

The development pattern of the new era has undergone changes. While adapting to the changes of the new era, higher vocational colleges should also establish a high-level education system that can face high-end and high-end industries in the industry, and continue to provide high-quality talent supply for industrial transformation and upgrading and economic structure optimization. Currently, China is developing advanced manufacturing industry and building a powerful manufacturing country as a key strategic choice for the industrial development model, ensuring the implementation and promotion of the strategy requires high-level

vocational education to provide a reserve force with comprehensive development of morality, intelligence, physique, beauty, and labor. Higher vocational colleges are the main positions for talent cultivation, which are most closely related to industrial development. They can quickly capture sensitive information about the rapid changes in industrial form, which can then be fed back to the educational and teaching activities of higher vocational colleges, and ultimately transform high-quality educational achievements into actual productivity. China has an independent and complete modern industrial system. Currently, China has 41 major industrial categories, 207 medium industrial categories, and 666 small industrial categories, forming an independent and complete modern industrial system. It is the only country in the world that has all the industrial categories listed in the United Nations Industrial Classification (Yang Hao, 2019). In the context of “Internet plus+industrialization”, the integration of big data, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, the Internet and other information technologies with the industry is becoming deeper and deeper, and the adjustment and optimization of the industrial structure is accelerating. At the same time, the corresponding occupational post standards of the industrial changes are higher, and the comprehensive quality requirements of technical and skilled talents who can support this change are more stringent. Only with high-quality talent supply and dynamically adjusted talent cultivation mechanisms can higher vocational colleges adapt to a series of new demands brought about by the upgrading of industrial form.

3. Main Difficulties Faced by High-Quality Development of Higher Vocational Colleges in the New Era

The new era requires higher vocational colleges to respond to the new needs of industrial development, improve social service capabilities, and contribute practical benefits to socialist modernization. Currently, higher vocational colleges face many difficulties in high-quality development. Only by breaking the shackles of these difficulties can we create conditions for high-quality development and realize the era value of higher vocational colleges.

3.1 Inadequate Integration of Industry and Education

At present, the integration of production and teaching in higher vocational colleges is only superficial, not deep. It is common for schools to be hot and enterprises to be cold. Enterprises have low enthusiasm for participating in vocational education and lack internal motivation. The cooperation between higher vocational colleges and enterprises only stays in the traditional form of cooperation, without opening up a new pattern of creative development. The key link of talent cultivation in higher vocational colleges is rarely seen in the presence of enterprises. The establishment of talent cultivation goals, the formulation of talent cultivation plans, and the setting of majors and curriculum structures, among other core tasks related to talent cultivation, are only completed by higher vocational colleges, resulting in a mismatch between the supply side of talent cultivation and the industry demand side. Enterprises are not willing to participate in the school-running cooperation of higher vocational colleges, and their willingness to participate is obviously not strong. They believe that the cost of investing in vocational education is high, and there is no higher income as a guarantee, and there is no corresponding preferential mechanism. As enterprises considering economic benefits, they naturally stray from the periphery of vocational education. On the one hand, higher vocational colleges lack the deep participation of enterprises, and their professional settings, teaching staff, curriculum development, and teaching content are all guided by textbook knowledge. They lack the cultivation of innovative ability, cross-border combination ability, and ability to solve practical problems. The quality of talent cultivation is not high, and higher vocational college graduates are not popular with enterprises. On the other hand, enterprises lack the initiative to deeply participate in talent cultivation in higher vocational colleges. Even though they have accepted the cooperation of higher vocational colleges, they are unwilling to continuously invest corresponding high-quality resources such as technology, human resources, and capital. The situation of joint education between schools and enterprises has not yet taken shape, seriously affecting the improvement of quality and excellence of higher vocational colleges and the realization of connotative development.

3.2 Shortage of Educational Resources

Adequate educational resources are the prerequisite for ensuring the orderly development of educational and teaching activities. At present, the development of higher vocational colleges in China is uneven, and there is a significant gap in running higher vocational colleges in the central and western regions. In terms of investment in running schools, higher vocational colleges and universities are significantly unequal compared to ordinary undergraduate colleges. Overall, “among the national higher education funds, the education funds of higher vocational colleges and universities only account for 17.82% of the total funds.” (Xing Hui, 2016) However, higher vocational colleges account for half of the total funds of higher education, and while expanding in scale, the running funds do not increase synchronously, making it difficult to maintain the material guarantee required for the high-quality development of higher vocational colleges. The process of connotation construction is blocked. High quality vocational teacher resources are also an important component of the educational resources of vocational colleges. Judging from the current situation of teachers in higher vocational colleges, not only is

the number of teachers insufficient, but also the structure is not perfect. The insufficient number of teachers has led to an increase in the ratio of students to teachers, making it difficult to improve the quality of education and teaching, especially the lack of support from backbone teachers. At the same time, the “double qualified” teacher team is not strong enough, making it difficult to improve the quality of practical teaching in colleges and universities, and the practical operation ability of students is weak. To achieve innovative development in higher vocational colleges in the new era, sufficient human, material, and financial resources are needed to support their talent cultivation and training. Only by gathering sufficient educational resources and playing their due role can we accelerate the high-quality development of higher vocational colleges.

3.3 Imperfect Quality Standard System in Higher Vocational Colleges

“Standards and quality are a pair of concepts that go hand in hand. When it comes to quality, standards must be talked about.” Standards are a necessary condition for evaluation and management. (Chen Yuxiang, 2007) The “20 Principles of Vocational Education” clearly states that one of the key tasks for the reform and development of vocational education in the future is to use 5-10 years to construct national standards for vocational education, providing policy guidance for the construction of the vocational education standard system. Due to the fact that the top national vocational standards have not yet been formed, the internal quality standard system of higher vocational colleges has not been fully established, leading to the failure to establish internal quality standards in terms of professional construction, curriculum planning, student internships, and teaching staff, seriously affecting the high-quality development of higher vocational colleges. The lack of quality standards, and the lack of strict standards for the scale and structure of talent cultivation in higher vocational colleges to ensure the quality of talent cultivation, have resulted in inconsistent employment standards between the talent supply side of colleges and the demand side of enterprises, and talent cultivation has seriously lagged behind the development of the industry. High quality development can only be achieved through standard comparison. Even though higher vocational colleges can independently formulate their own standards based on the technical premise of superior standards, due to the fact that the internal quality management system of colleges is still in the exploratory stage, there are occasional relapses in the diagnosis and improvement of quality standards, which affects the overall quality improvement of higher vocational colleges. In the context of the development of the new era, technology is changing with each passing day, and traditional positions are rapidly disappearing. New positions have created higher requirements for the high-quality development of higher vocational colleges, requiring them to benchmark and cultivate talents with a more front-end perspective. The imperfection of the quality standard system for running higher vocational colleges is one of the main obstacles to the construction of modern vocational education system. Governments, schools, industry enterprises, and vocational education and training institutions have the obligation to participate in the construction of the quality standard system for higher vocational colleges, and promote the high-quality development of higher vocational colleges by exerting the subjective initiative of all stakeholders.

4. Countermeasures for High Quality Development of Higher Vocational Colleges in the New Era

Higher vocational colleges are in the new wave of reform and development of vocational education. Facing the opportunities and challenges of the external environment, it is necessary for higher vocational colleges to respond to the needs of the new era with higher levels and high-quality educational and teaching results. Quality is the ultimate weapon for higher vocational colleges to maintain their vigorous vitality. It is not only necessary to actively explore the changes in demand for high-quality technical and skilled talents under the trend of industrial upgrading and reform, but also to improve the innovation ability, cross-border research ability, and technological application ability of talents, laying a solid foundation for modernization construction.

4.1 Deepen the Integration of Industry and Education, and Build a Community of Shared Destiny for the Integration of Industry and Education in Higher Vocational Colleges

In 1995, Western scholars Henry Etzkowitz and Laurette Redsfors proposed the triple helix theory. According to this theory, in the era of knowledge economy, universities and enterprises should blur the boundaries between them and establish close cooperative relationships, which should be supported and encouraged by the government. The integration of industry and education is the key direction of the reform and development of higher vocational education. The triple helix theory provides constructive theoretical guidance for deepening the integration of industry and education in higher vocational education in the future. “Several Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Industry and Education” issued by the General Office of the State Council mentions that it will take about 10 years for education and industry to form an overall development pattern of integrated and benign interaction. In order to achieve the main goal of deepening the integration of industry and education, higher vocational colleges, enterprises, and the government must jointly act, play their respective roles, and play their due roles, thereby contributing to promoting social and economic development. First of all, higher vocational colleges should focus on their majors, optimize their professional layout and structure, highly align with the development needs of regional industries, and improve their ability to serve the development of

regional enterprises. Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of a “double qualified” teacher team, jointly cultivate a high-level and structured teacher team between schools and enterprises, regularly engage key teachers in enterprise practice, improve teachers’ professional level and practical operation ability, and timely feed back new technologies and processes from enterprises into teaching practice, achieving the integration of teaching content and production processes. Finally, schools and enterprises should form a community of shared destiny, jointly build a practical training base that integrates industry and education, optimize the allocation of resources inside and outside the school, and jointly promote the construction of a practical teaching system to truly form a coordinated and integrated development pattern of education and industry.

4.2 Increase Investment in Education and Improve the Diversified Investment Mechanism

The transition of higher vocational education from a school running model based on general education to a school running pattern dominated by the government, with the active participation of industry and enterprises, and the deep participation of social forces, is a significant manifestation of deepening the reform of the school running system and mechanism in vocational education. The plight of insufficient investment in higher vocational colleges has always hindered their progress towards high-quality development. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the diversified investment mechanism and comprehensively improve the shortage of educational resources in higher vocational colleges. Firstly, it is necessary to improve the level of funding investment in higher vocational colleges. While increasing investment in education, it is also necessary to plan education expenditures rationally. Educational expenditures from the central to local levels should be tilted towards vocational education, strengthen income expenditure management for higher vocational colleges, and improve a sound investment and expenditure management system. Secondly, the central government has established a special fund to provide financial support to higher vocational colleges. The central government should increase support for higher vocational colleges in poverty-stricken areas, allocate special funds to support the establishment of awards and grants in higher vocational colleges, and alleviate the dilemma of tight funding for higher vocational colleges. Finally, the government should provide external incentives to stimulate social forces to deeply participate in vocational education through policy design and institutional arrangements, and implement practical incentives for industry enterprises and social forces to participate in vocational education through a combination of preferential policies of “finance+finance+land+credit”. At the same time, funding channels should also be diversified. Local governments should introduce practical regulations to encourage financial institutions to provide corresponding credit services to higher vocational colleges, to solve their worries about funding, and ensure that higher vocational colleges operate in a standardized, orderly, and legal manner.

4.3 Improve the Internal Quality Standard System to Achieve High-Quality Development in Higher Vocational Colleges

“Higher vocational colleges should improve their quality management institutions, establish a comprehensive quality management system, and manage the entire process of education and teaching in accordance with the PDCA [Plan Do Check Action] cycle, making teaching quality management a closed loop.”^[6] The General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council have issued the “Opinions on Promoting the High Quality Development of Modern Vocational Education”, which clearly proposes to improve the quality assurance system. A sound internal quality standard system is an important manifestation of the governance capacity of universities. Without quality standards, there will be no high-quality management, and high-quality development will be impossible. Higher vocational colleges must scientifically establish an internal quality standard system, with professional construction quality standards as the core, learn from or refer to advanced foreign vocational education standards, explore the establishment of college standards suitable for the actual development of colleges, and provide replicable experience for the construction and improvement of national standards. First of all, all teachers and students in higher vocational colleges should form a sense of quality, internalize quality construction in their hearts, and externalize it in their actions, throughout the daily learning and life of each teacher and student. At the same time, a complete campus quality culture system can be formed, from the school regulations to each course, highlighting the value of quality standards. Secondly, the construction of the internal quality standard system must closely follow the trend of the times, focus on economic and social development trends and new changes in scientific and technological progress, integrate the demands of different stakeholders, focus on reflecting students’ professional sustainable development ability, and reflect the dynamic and comprehensive characteristics of the construction of internal quality standards. Finally, the construction effectiveness of the internal quality standard system ultimately needs to be tested through school running practice to verify its scientificity and rationality, and timely diagnose and improve the problems existing in the high-quality development of higher vocational colleges, so as to promote the reform process of higher vocational education.

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