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Research on the Strategy of Improving the Employability of Students in Higher Vocational Colleges Based on the Perspective of Enterprise Demand

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ABSTRACT

There is a gap between the "hard ability" and "soft ability" of vocational college students from the needs of enterprises. Through the questionnaire survey (n=1639) and enterprise interviews (n=30), it is found that the evaluation of employability factors such as "job skills, loyalty, professionalism, time concept, service awareness, and psychological adjustment ability" are generally low. This study proposes to "deepen the reform of professional courses and highlight the occupational orientation of courses"; "The school and enterprise build the practice base together, strengthen the student occupation adaptability"; "Building a campus professional culture and cultivating students' professional quality"; "Building a multi-education platform to comprehensively improve employability" etc. strategies. These strategies can improve the employability of vocational college students and enhance their employment competitiveness.

1. Introduction

At present, the employment difficulties of college students are mainly concentrated in two aspects: supply and demand imbalance and structural contradiction. First, there is an imbalance between the employment demand of college graduates and the supply of corporate jobs. As colleges continue to expand enrollment, the number of graduates is increasing. The number of college graduates in 2022 will reach 10.76 million, a record high. The supply of jobs will continue to decrease due to factors such as the COVID-19 epidemic, economic downturn, and supply-side reforms. This further exacerbates the imbalance between supply and demand. The second is the dislocation between the employability of college graduates and the needs of enterprises, and the dislocation of employment concepts and career development, which intensifies structural contradictions. The new normal of the economy has driven the emergence and development of many emerging industries and new formats, and

new requirements and changes in the required knowledge, abilities and qualities, have led to the disconnection of the skills learned by a considerable number of college students. The structural contradiction of "learning not for use" exacerbating the employment difficulties of college students. Furthermore, most of the contemporary college students are only children, born in superior families, and have little pressure to survive, resulting in low employment desire, discerning employment choices, and high employment expectations, making it difficult to adapt to the employment situation under the new normal. Faced with the employment problem of supply and demand imbalance and structural contradictions, vocational colleges should focus on strengthening employment ability training based on the employment needs of industry enterprises and improving students' employment competitiveness. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that "large-scale vocational skills training, focusing on solving structural employment contradictions, and encouraging entrepreneurship to drive employment" pointed out the direction of efforts to solve the employment problem.

2.0 Literature Review

Reviewing the research literature, it is found that the definition of employability has not yet reached a conclusion, and the definition of employability is different with different research perspectives or different focuses. From the definition of the concept of employability, it can be roughly divided into two perspectives: organizational and individual. From the perspective of organization, the concept of employability is put forward and some representative ones include the International Labor Conference and the American Council on Education and Employment. The International Labour Conference (2000) defines employability as the ability of an individual to obtain and keep a job, to progress at work, and to cope with changes in working life (Winelt, 2004). The American Council on Education and Employment (2000) considers employability as the ability to obtain and keep a job (Gao, Chen, 2008).

Sorting out the concept of employability, it is found that most of them are defined from the perspective or focus of individual research, and the definition of the concept is different. Such as: Hillage & Pollard (1998) proposed that employability is the ability to obtain initial employment, maintain employment, and obtain new employment when necessary. Rothwell & Arnold (2007) proposed that employability is the ability to obtain and maintain one's ideal occupation. Xie Zhiyuan(2005) believe that employability is a comprehensive ability related to occupation, including knowledge, skills, attitude, personality, psychological endurance and so on. ^[5] Zhang Deyi (2019) believes that employability is the attitude, quality and knowledge and skills that an employee needs to be successful in employment and maintain employment well. Some scholars define the concept of employability by taking college students as a specific object. For example, Zheng Xiaoming (2002) believes that the employability of college students refers to the ability of college graduates to achieve employment ideals, meet social needs, and realize their own value in social life through knowledge learning and comprehensive quality development during school. Zeng Xiangquan (2009) believes that the employability of college students, in essence, is the ability to find a job, keep a job and change jobs. Wang Feng (2018) believes that the employability of college students refers to the ability of college students to actively seek and successfully obtain an ideal job that is compatible with their qualification level after properly evaluating their own situation and labor market needs, and be able to maintain work, be competent for work, and A collection of knowledge, skills, competencies and qualities required to successfully transfer jobs when necessary.

In general, the author believes that the employability of college students refers to the collection of "hard skills" and "soft skills" required by college students to master competent occupations and maintain career development through professional training and comprehensive quality development. "Hard capabilities" include professional skills, job skills, etc. "Soft ability" includes professional quality, professional attitude, professional ethics, professional ethics and so on.

3.0 Method

According to the survey conducted by the project team on enterprises, the 16 factors that enterprises are more concerned about the employability of graduates are "professional learning ability, job skills, sense of responsibility, hard work, steadfastness, initiative, psychological adjustment ability, execution ability, teamwork Collaborative ability, practical ability, understanding ability, communication ability, professionalism, service spirit, time concept, loyalty". In order to know objectively the evaluation status of enterprise on vocational college students' employment ability, the Likert 7 scale was used to design the vocational college students' employment ability evaluation questionnaire. The evaluation criteria are "very dissatisfied = 1, dissatisfied = 2, somewhat dissatisfied = 3, generally satisfied = 4, somewhat satisfied = 5, satisfied = 6, very satisfied = 7". The project team conducted a survey on companies that recruited graduates of Guangzhou City Construction College in 2019, 2020, and 2021 through an online survey, and used SPSS20.0 software to conduct statistical analysis on the collected data.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the enterprise's evaluation of the employment performance of vocational college students and listen to the enterprise's suggestions on the training of vocational college talents. The project team selected 30 representative enterprises of different types from the Pearl River Delta cities to conduct interviews and investigations. Interview survey outline the following questions.

1. Q1: What abilities do you think will have a significant impact on the job search of vocational college students?
2. Q2: How do you think the employability of vocational college students is? Which abilities are lacking?
3. Q3: What suggestions do you have for improving the employability of students in vocational colleges?

4.0 Results

Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 show that the average comprehensive evaluation of the graduates' employability in 2019, 2020, and 2021 by enterprises is 5.96, 6.03, and 5.95, which are between relatively satisfied and satisfied. It shows that the comprehensive evaluation of the employability of vocational college students by enterprises is relatively high.

Table 1: Comprehensive evaluation of the employability of 2019 graduates by enterprises

	N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Standard deviation
Overview	809	1	7	5.96	1.209
Valid N (list state)	809				

Table 2: Comprehensive evaluation of the employability of 2020 graduates by enterprises

	N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Standard deviation
Overview	254	1	7	6.03	1.152
Valid N (list state)	254				

Table 3: Comprehensive evaluation of the employability of 2021 graduates by enterprises

	N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Standard deviation
Overview	576	1	7	5.95	1.052
Valid N (list state)	576				

Table 4 shows that the median of the enterprise's evaluation of the employability of 2019 graduates is 5.90, including "execution, loyalty, initiative, work skills, time concept, professional learning ability, service awareness, professionalism" and other employability factor evaluations are below the median.

Table 4: Itemized evaluation of the employability of 2019 graduates by enterprises

	N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Standard deviation
carefully and modest	809	1	7	5.98	1.249
teamwork	809	1	7	5.96	1.219
sense of responsibility	809	1	7	5.95	1.255
hard-working	809	1	7	5.95	1.262
Communication skills	809	1	7	5.92	1.225
Comprehension	809	1	7	5.92	1.234
hands-on ability	809	1	7	5.92	1.236
psychological adjustment ability	809	1	7	5.91	1.269
executive power	809	1	7	5.89	1.228
loyalty	809	1	7	5.89	1.279
initiative	809	1	7	5.88	1.283
Job skills	809	1	7	5.88	1.378
concept of time	809	1	7	5.87	1.357
Professional learning ability	809	1	7	5.87	1.212
Service awareness	809	1	7	5.82	1.375
Professionalism	809	1	7	5.80	1.383
Valid N (list state)	809				

Table 5 shows that the median of the enterprise's evaluation of the employability of 2020 graduates is 5.95, including "psychological adaptability, professional learning ability, executive ability, work skills, time concept, service awareness, professionalism" and other employability factors are evaluated below the median.

Table 5: Itemized evaluation of the employability of 2020 graduates by enterprises

	N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Standard deviation
carefully and modest	254	1	7	6.00	1.181
team work	254	1	7	6.00	1.193
Communication skills	254	1	7	5.97	1.171
Comprehension	254	1	7	5.96	1.157
hard-working	254	1	7	5.96	1.222
sense of responsibility	254	1	7	5.96	1.194
initiative	254	1	7	5.95	1.205
hands-on ability	254	1	7	5.95	1.221
loyalty	254	1	7	5.95	1.185
psychological adjustment ability	254	1	7	5.94	1.227
professional learning abil- ity	254	1	7	5.94	1.164
executive power	254	1	7	5.93	1.203
Job skills	254	1	7	5.91	1.168
concept of time	254	1	7	5.90	1.255
Service awareness	254	1	7	5.90	1.249
Professionalism	254	1	7	5.86	1.316
Valid N (list state)	254				

Table 6 shows that the median of the enterprise's evaluation of the employability of 2021 graduates is 5.91, including "loyalty, time concept, communication ability, service awareness, psychological adjustment ability, work skills, initiative, professionalism" and other employability abilities factor evaluations are below the median.

Table 6: Itemized evaluation of the employability of 2021 graduates by enterprises

	N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Standard deviation
carefully and modest	576	1	7	5.96	1.080
team work	576	1	7	5.95	1.053
sense of responsibility	576	1	7	5.94	1.070
hands-on ability	576	1	7	5.93	1.060
hard-working	576	1	7	5.92	1.086
professional learning ability	576	1	7	5.91	1.062
Comprehension	576	1	7	5.91	1.058

executive power	576	1	7	5.91	1.054
loyalty	576	1	7	5.90	1.091
concept of time	576	1	7	5.89	1.111
Communication skills	576	1	7	5.89	1.084
Service awareness	576	1	7	5.89	1.116
psychological adjustment ability	576	1	7	5.89	1.109
Job skills	576	1	7	5.88	1.065
initiative	576	1	7	5.88	1.085
Professionalism	576	1	7	5.87	1.115
Valid N (list state)	576				

A comprehensive analysis of the enterprise's sub-assessment of the employability of graduates in 2019, 2020, and 2021 shows that enterprises have higher evaluations of employability factors such as "steadfastness, hard work, teamwork ability, and sense of responsibility" for vocational college students. It shows that the professional attitude of vocational college students "steadfast, hard-working, and responsible" has been well received by enterprises. Relatively speaking, the evaluation of employability factors such as "loyalty, professionalism, professional learning ability, job skills, time concept, and service awareness" is generally low. It shows that there is a certain gap between these employability and enterprise employment needs. Among them, professional learning ability and job skills belong to "hard ability", while loyalty, professionalism, time concept and service awareness belong to "soft ability". It can be seen that students in vocational colleges are lacking in both "hard skills" and "soft skills" to a certain extent.

After sorting out the interview content, it is found that most of the interviewed companies believe that vocational skills, teamwork ability, interpersonal communication ability, sense of responsibility and hard-working spirit have a significant impact on the job search of vocational college students. A lack of professionalism, responsibility, loyalty and professional skills is considered a disadvantage for recent graduates. The summary of the interview is as follows:

- (1) The interviewed enterprises have a high evaluation on the job competence of vocational college students, and believe that short-term training can enable them to take up jobs quickly and have strong job adaptability.
- (2) The interviewed enterprises believe that vocational college students have good professional attitudes, are proactive, practical and conscientious in their work, have strong work execution ability, and are able to complete their work tasks well.
- (3) Interviewed enterprises believe that vocational college students have high professional quality, strong teamwork ability, communication and coordination ability, interpersonal communication ability, etc.
- (4) Interviewed enterprises believe that the employability of vocational college students is relatively lacking in loyalty, professionalism, psychological adjustment ability, and ability to withstand pressure. Facing challenging work, they are prone to negative emotions and frequent breaches of contract in the early stages of employment.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The results from questionnaires and interviewed enterprises provided few suggestions to improve the employability of vocational college students in three aspects. Below are the details for these three suggestions.

5.1 Deepen the reform of professional courses and highlight the vocational orientation of courses

The "National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan" pointed out that "to guide industry enterprises to deeply participate in the training and training of technical and skilled personnel, promote vocational colleges to strengthen professional construction, deepen curriculum reform, enhance training content, improve the level of teachers, and comprehensively improve the quality of education and teaching."^[12] Vocational colleges should organically integrate the employability elements that enterprises are concerned about into the talent training program, build a professional education system that promotes the improvement of students' employability in an all-round way, and focus on enhancing vocational adaptive education. Professional education is an important carrier of talent training in vocational colleges. Integrating professional ability and professional quality training into professional education, highlighting the professional orientation of professional courses can target the development of students' employability, and highlight the cultivation of students' professional adaptability. For example, we should strengthen practical teaching such as professional practice and enterprise practice, and actively create conditions to guide students to participate in professional-related enterprise practice or enterprise part-time jobs, so that the professional knowledge and technical skills acquired by students can truly meet the needs of jobs, and improve students' employment adaptability.

5.2 School-enterprise joint construction of practice bases to strengthen students' professional adaptability

The integration of production and education and school-enterprise cooperation are not only important starting points for talent training in vocational colleges, but also key supporting points for improving the quality of talent training. Vocational colleges should effectively improve the employability of students, without the participation of enterprises, it is tantamount to "seeking fish from wood." The practice base is an important place for cultivating students' professional ability, job skills and career adaptability. The school-enterprise co-construction practice base can provide vocational college students with a real working environment that is "close to production, close to technology, and close to craftsmanship" and adapts to the development requirements of enterprises. Students can not only experience the requirements of actual jobs, but also continuously improve their practice skills, job skills, and can improve the level of social adaptability such as teamwork awareness, interpersonal skills, and enhance occupational adaptability. Building a campus professional culture and cultivating students' professional quality Campus culture is an important part of school education and has an important function of educating people. Vocational colleges uphold the educational concept of "employment-oriented, ability-based" to cultivate high-quality laborers and technical and skilled talents. Therefore, the construction of campus culture should integrate professional elements and highlight professionalism. Vocational culture is an important part of campus culture, integrating vocational culture education into campus culture construction and creating a strong professional culture atmosphere can subtly cultivate students' professional quality and guide students to establish correct professional values. For example, excellent corporate culture exhibitions are set up in public places on campus to infect and nurture students with excellent corporate culture; training rooms are set up with simulated workplace experience areas to experience professional culture through the workplace environment and help students recognize their careers; campus cultural activities are integrated into professional elements, Clarify the career orientation of the second classroom activities, cultivate students' professional quality in a targeted manner, and improve their employability and career adaptability.

5.3 Taking job-appropriate training as the starting point, focus on improving employability

According to feedback from enterprises, there is a discrepancy between the employability of students in vocational colleges and the employment needs of enterprises. After arriving on the job, they need to go through systematic training before they can take up the job, and the employment period is long. The enterprise invests a lot of manpower, material resources, time and other costs. In order to solve the problem of misalignment between students' employability and enterprise employment needs, vocational colleges should take job training as the starting point to build a systematic and modular job training curriculum system. In view of the shortcomings of students' employability, training based on job competency training is carried out to improve students' job competency. For example, the enterprise evaluates the current situation of students' vocational ability through vocational ability assessment. According to the ability requirements of key positions, training is carried out on the short board of students' employability, so as to improve the competency of the positions, and solve the problems of mismatches between people and positions and long employment periods. According to the ability requirements of key positions, according to the principle of "what to do, what to learn; what to make up for what is lacking", the school-enterprise collaborative development of job-appropriate training courses. By pre-installing job-appropriate training in schools, it can improve students' job competency and employment stability, and effectively reduce corporate recruitment costs and training costs.

In conclusion, by enhancing the employability of graduates and enhancing the core competitiveness of graduates' employment, it provides support for high-quality employment and career development of graduates.

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