Innovation of Profession-oriented Cultivation Mode for Full-time Professional Degree Postgraduates

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Abstract: Currently, the scale of the full-time professional degree postgraduates is rapidly expanding, and the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China proposed that professional degree postgraduate education should be oriented to the enhancement of students’ professional competence. However, in real practice, a number of problems were observed in professional degree postgraduate education, including a prevailing trend of academization, the lack of professional orientation in the curriculum system, the incomplete dual-mentor system, the mere formality of professional practice, and the lack of connection with professional qualifications. Therefore, full-time professional degree postgraduate education should be oriented to professional demand, and the cooperation between the government, colleges and enterprises should be enhanced, aiming to innovate the mode of full-time professional degree postgraduate education and cultivate highly competent applied talents.

Introduction

The professional degree postgraduate education program was first established in 1991 in China. With the substantial development of national economy and society, the social demand for high-level talents has been greatly increased. In 2009, the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China decided to admit full-time professional degree postgraduates from the graduates of the current year. Until 2015, China had approved and set up 40 categories of professional degrees, and the students enrolled in professional degree education accounted for nearly 50% of the total number of enrolled postgraduates. Professional degree postgraduate education plays an increasingly important role in postgraduate education. Therefore, it has become urgent to explore how to cultivate highly competent and specialized talents with balanced professional and academic abilities by referring to the education model of academic postgraduates.

I. Characteristics of Professional Degree Postgraduate Education

As one type of professional educations, professional degree education is aimed to develop high-level specialized talents to meet the specialized social demands, and is characterized by the balance between professional and academic ability and the orientation to particular professional practice. Some scholars have pointed out the four characters of professional degree education: firstly, academic feature, which is due to the basic character of a degree system; secondly, innovation, because as postgraduate education, higher standards should be set up for professional degree education concerning knowledge, competence and quality than for undergraduate education; thirdly, practicableness, as only through practice and application can the cultivation goal be achieved; fourthly, professional character, which is determined by the initial intention of professional degree education. The professional character is the basic feature that distinguishes the professional degree postgraduate education from the academic degree postgraduate education.
II. Necessity of Profession-Orientation in Full-Time Professional Degree Post Graduate Education

At present, great importance has been attached to the cultivation of applied talents by all the nations around the world. Since the implementation of strategies of “innovation-driven development” and “one belt, one road” in China, the social need for high-level applied talents becomes more urgent. In the “Guidance for Further Reform of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Colleges and Universities”, it is stressed that the talent-cultivation mode should be further reformed, and the education departments should focus on the establishment of demand-oriented structure of academic disciplines as well as the cultivation of entrepreneurship- and profession-oriented talents, which is expected to promote the link between talent cultivation and the demand of social/economic development and entrepreneurship/employment. The professionalism of professional degrees has been clearly specified when they were first set. Therefore, not only the enrollment scale should be expanded, but also innovation should be made in the cultivation mode by considering the professional demand, aiming to cultivate high-quality and high-level applied talents to meet the needs of social development.

1. Professional Orientation Meets the Demand of Economic and Social Developments

Due to the New Normal of Chinese Economy and the massive innovation and entrepreneurial boom, higher education should be adjusted following the economic and social changes to meet the demand for high-level talents. Hence, besides the cultivation of more academic talents with research ability, high-level applied talents specialized at technology development and promotion, management and social service should also be cultivated. In this background, full-time professional degree postgraduate education has been rapidly developing, which will probably represent the general trend of education development in the future to satisfy the demand of social and economic development.

2. Professional Orientation Satisfies the Demand of Students’ Career development.

Currently, due to the employment pressure of undergraduates, most of them choose to pursue full time professional degree education for better employment. In fact, they have not received any training of professional ethics, skills, behaviors and consciousness. The general trend of employment for postgraduates in recent years shows that the employment of postgraduates is gradually shifting from teaching and researching positions to public administration, business management and technical positions. Therefore, to satisfy the demand of students’ career development, full-time professional degree postgraduate education must be consistently oriented to the need of career development.

3. Professional Orientation Facilitates the Social Service of Colleges and Universities.

The basic functions of colleges and universities include talent cultivation, scientific research, social service and cultural inheritance and innovation. And in essence, all of these functions are actually embodied in social service. Professional degree postgraduate education can promote the connection between higher education and the society, which can make colleges and universities undertake more social responsibilities and functions. Through professional degree postgraduate education, colleges and universities can cultivate large numbers of high-quality and specialized talents by cooperating with enterprises and local government. Hence, professional orientation can meet social demands and help colleges and universities to better serve the society.

III. Problems in Full-Time Professional Degree Postgraduate Education

1. Obvious Academization during Cultivation Process

Professional degree postgraduate education has both professional and academic features, and is particularly characterized by its professional character. With the expansion in the enrollment of
full-time professional degree postgraduates, colleges and universities have undertaken more work of cultivating professional degree postgraduates. Although the superior department has issued guidance for the education mode, many colleges and universities still tend to refer to or even merely follow the programs for academic degree postgraduates. As a result, the curriculums, teaching plans and contents have little difference from those of academic postgraduates. Moreover, academization is also found in the requirement of degree paper, management and internship and practical training. Finally, the program aimed to cultivate high-level applied talents produces academic talents with professional degrees.

2. Indistinct professional orientation in curriculum teaching

At present, in some colleges and universities, the curriculums for professional degree education are discipline- or teacher-centered, and many courses are set up based on the faculty instead of based on professional orientation. As a result, the curriculum system lays more emphasis on the ability of scientific research and innovation, and thus is not profession-oriented. In addition, the team of teachers are lack of practical experiences, and lecturing and theory take dominant positions in the courses. However, in professional degree education, the teaching should highlight applicability and practical ability by on-the-spot teaching and case teaching, which can combine the theory and practice, and develop the thinking and practicing ability of students.

3. Incomplete Dual-Mentor System

The system of tutor evaluation and employment needs to be reformed. The professional degree postgraduates are tutored by some teachers who undertake the academic degree education in some colleges or universities. These teachers are lack of practice and usually focus on fundamental and theoretical research, and their research is not closely connected with real practice. As a result, they may instruct the professional degree postgraduates with the method for academic degree postgraduates, for example, taking the publication of articles as the orientation, which cannot meet the demand of professional degree postgraduates for career development. Besides, the connection and communication between the college mentors and enterprise mentors may be very insufficient. There are more theoretical courses than practical courses in the college, resulting in a serious lack of practice of the students. The present research assessment systems and personnel employment system cause the fact that the mentors are only concerned with the research output, and regard research output as an important criterion to evaluate the quality of postgraduates. In general, the dual-mentor system may not be able to work effectively because of the lack of practical instructions from both the college and enterprise mentors.

4. Poorly Constructed Practical Bases and Serious Lack of Practical Education

The quantity and quality of practice bases jointly built by colleges and enterprises are far from enough, which cannot meet the demand of practice teaching for professional degree postgraduates. Thus, the practice is more formalistic than practical. Furthermore, with the gradual increase of quota of full-time professional degree postgraduates, the quota of academic degree postgraduates for each tutor has decreased. Hence, to ensure the research output, the mentors are reluctant to sent professional degree postgraduates to the enterprises for practice, which also contributes to the lack of practice education of full-time professional degree postgraduates.

5. Loose connection with professional qualification

In China, professional degree postgraduate education is not well accepted by the society, which is largely attributable to the fact that professional degree is not closely linked to the professional qualification system. Many domestic professional qualification tests are not classified based on degrees, and people from different industries could take the tests for getting the certificates, which does not reflect the differences between academic degrees and professional degrees. The course examinations for professional degree postgraduates are not consistent with the content of professional qualification tests. The students have to pass the school tests, and meanwhile to pursue the corresponding qualification certificates, which actually is a serious waste of time and efforts. At present, only a small part of professional degrees, such as landscape architecture and architecture, have been related to corresponding professional qualification systems, and the establishment of the
connection and coordination between professional qualification and other professional degrees is
still at the initial stage.

Iv. Building Profession-oriented Cultivation Mode of Full-time Professional Degree
Postgraduates

1. Highlighting the Features of Full-Time Professional Degree Postgraduate Education

Professional degree postgraduate education in China was launched at such a late time compared
with in other countries, resulting in the misunderstanding and lack of acceptance about it in the
society. The government, universities, society and mentors should shift away from traditional
concepts, and attach importance to the cultivation of full-time professional degree postgraduates
from various aspects, such as recognition, policy, institution and management. The cultivation
should highlight the professional features and retain the academic character as well. Following the
requirements of the Professional Degree Education Committee, the colleges or universities should
take professional competence as the major goal, establish specific cultivating program to reduce
academization in the education of professional degree postgraduates, reform the cultivation mode
based on the principle of professional orientation, and highlight the distinct features of professional
degree postgraduates.

2. Participation of Industry Experts in Curriculum System Design

The curriculum system for professional degree education should be oriented by the demands of job
market and focused on the improvement of students’ professional skills. In terms of courses, the
quantity and proportion of elective courses should be increased to provide students with more
chances of individualized development. In the terms of curriculum teaching, teachers should
encouraged to reform the traditional methods, and make use of more case analysis, discussion and
interactive teaching to strengthen the students’ application ability of professional knowledge and
practice ability though combining theory with practice. The participation of industrial experts in the
designing of curriculum system can ensure that the curriculum system meets the demands of the
society and enterprises, achieving the goal of individualized cultivation. Colleges and universities
should offer courses of career planning and employment guidance to satisfy the need of full-time
professional degree postgraduates in career development. Besides, to strengthen the innovation
ability of the students, some courses about innovation and entrepreneurship education should be
provided based on the cooperation between the colleges and enterprises.

3. Strengthening the Construction of the Faculty Team

The dual-mentor system in the professional degree education has higher requirements for the
mentors in number as well as in quality. A superior mentor team can ensure the sustainable
development of professional degree education. On the one hand, high standards should be set up for
the evaluation and recruiting of the mentors. The selection criteria for professional degree education
mentors in the college should lay more emphasis on practical experience, and those teachers whose
research directions are closer to the needs of enterprises should be provided with more quota of
professional degree students. Besides, the mentors need to participate in more practice to increase
their own practice ability. On the other hand, colleges and universities should standardize the
selection system of enterprise mentors, specify the selection criteria and selection process, and
make clear the work, duties and remuneration of the enterprise mentors after selection, so as to
improve the quality and effects of enterprise mentors. In addition, the communication and
interaction between the college mentors and enterprise mentors should be strengthened. The work
should be clearly divided and cooperation should be promoted: the college mentors are mainly
responsible for the cultivation of theoretical ability and thesis supervision, and the enterprise
mentors are mainly responsible for practice education.
4. Enhancement of Practical Education

According to the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, the least required time for the internship of professional degree postgraduates is half a year. Thus, the colleges and universities should seek for cooperation with the enterprises in a variety of ways based on the fields of different professional degrees. With the support of government policies, the cooperation should be bridged between the colleges and enterprises, such as the establishment of postgraduate workstations. Colleges and universities should also actively support the connection among the colleges, mentors and enterprises, which may help the establishment of long-term and stable off-campus practice bases for multiple disciplines and colleges. The mentors can actively recommend the professional degree postgraduates to the enterprises for practice through cooperation projects, providing them with practice chances by establishing multi-level and multi-discipline practice bases, which will largely improve the enterprise-university cooperation and facilitate the cultivation of high-level applied talents.

5. Establishment of the Links between Professional Degree Education and Professional Qualification

The links between professional degree education and professional qualification can help to promote the potentials of career development of the professional degree postgraduates. The related departments should effectively coordinate to solve the problems that hinder the link between professional degree education and professional qualification. Universities should take the initiative to promote the cooperation with professional departments, explore the possibility of immunity and mutual recognition between college courses and professional qualification tests, and connect professional qualification with the awarding of degrees. For those courses similar to the qualification tests in contents, colleges and universities can organize the teaching contents based on the qualification tests, trying to keep consistent with the requirements of professional qualification. For some more highly specialized professions, the government should make the relevant professional degrees as the compulsory prerequisites for professional qualification.

Summary

The cultivation of full-time professional degree postgraduates plays an increasingly important role in social and economic development. Due to its distinct professional feature, full-time professional degree postgraduate education must highlight professional quality education, which can improve the ability of career development of professional degree postgraduates. Therefore, only through reforming the cultivation mode of full-time professional degree postgraduates based on professional demands and establishing the win-win cooperation of government, university and company can the colleges and universities cultivate high-level applied talents to meet the demands of social development and economic construction.

Reference


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