A Study on the Cultivation Modes of Students’ Soft Skills in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Keywords: Higher vocational college, Soft skills, Cultivation mode.

Abstract. This paper analyzes graduates' ideas of soft skills through survey investigations, and it studies the common status of soft skills cultivation modes in higher vocational colleges and the status of soft skills’ cultivation modes in higher vocational colleges is attained. In addition, it studies the concept and content of soft skills, and explains soft skills cultivation modes in the following three aspects: the modification of curriculum design, the cultivation and training of teachers, and the construction of training spots.

Introduction

According to the "Ministry of Education suggestions and opinions about employment-oriented deepening the reform of higher vocational education"¹, Chinese vocational colleges should be employment-oriented, and should insist on cultivating personnel with strong practical ability, good vocational virtue and high techniques when facing the requirements of the first line in production, construction, management and service, these personnel are willing to go, stay there and be used. In the process of students’ cultivation in vocational colleges, they usually pay more attention to cultivating students’ hard skills. Hard skills refer to skills with clear quantification that can be acquired by theoretical learning, and practical operations training, such as exam grades, practicing qualified certificates, English level certificates and so on. But colleges don' pay much attention to cultivating soft skills. With the progress of technology of times, and the change of employees’ requirements of the society, enterprises gradually improve their requirements of student employees, and they need employees who can deal with new problems and learn new knowledge. If students are lacking in good soft skills, just relying on their own knowledge, hard skills and following fixed rules without innovation, they will certainly not create the first-class achievement. Therefore, higher colleges begin to realize the importance and urgency of students’ soft skills’ cultivation.

The Status of Soft Skills’ Cultivation Modes in Higher Vocational Colleges

Higher Vocational Colleges’ Inadequate Focus on Students' Soft Skills Cultivation

According the Mycos's investigation report of 2016 graduates in Wuhan Technical College of Communication, it can be seen that graduates in Wuhan Technical College of Communication know little about soft skills: teamwork ability (58%), communicating ability (54%), continual learning ability (53%), and solving-problem ability (52%), as shown in Figure 1. In the investigation of students' understanding and knowing about soft skills, teamwork ability takes up the most proportion, but there are only 58% (of which, 18% think it a far-reaching influence, 40% think it the most influential). During the term in the college, students fix more focus on their own hard skills cultivation, such as exam grades, and kinds of certificates and the college also pays more attention to theoretical teaching and practical operations, lacking in the cultivation of student s’ soft skills.
The Analysis of Soft Skills’ Cultivation Modes in Higher Vocational Colleges

Case analysis is adopted to analyze the personnel training scheme of automobile overhaul and repairing major in School of Automobile Engineering in this college, and general rules of soft skills’ cultivation modes in higher vocational colleges are got. It is shown in the Table 1 that vocational ability analysis and curriculum design of car detection and reparation major.

Table 1. The analysis of vocational ability and curriculum setting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Whether contain the cultivation of soft skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical work communication</td>
<td>Yes, more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile parts overhaul</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile and its systematic operations</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile dis-assembly and assembly</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile marketing, insurance and claims</td>
<td>Yes, less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile repairing</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile failure diagnosis and exclusion</td>
<td>Yes, less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Technical work communication need ability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Vocational ability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical work communication</td>
<td>• The certain English reading ability;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The ability to express in written form and communicate with others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The certain ability to operate computers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The certain ability to organize and coordinate, and the strong ability to cultivate and have strong cooperation awareness;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Having driving licenses and drive cars expertly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the analysis of Table 1 and Table 2, it can be seen that, in the students’ cultivation in the higher vocational college, the point is still focused on the hard skills, such as automobile parts overhaul, dis-assembly and assembly, failure diagnosis and exclusion; for soft skills, it is shown in the communication of technological work, cars selling, insurance and claims; it emphasizes the expressing ability and coordinate ability, and it doesn’t precisely explain about the specific content, cultivation modes, testing ways of soft skills. The whole curriculum design majorly focuses on the
application, so fewer courses with humanity and universe are provided for students to automatically choose.

The Concept and Content of Soft Skills

Hard skills have clear and definite testing ways to cultivate students’ professional knowledge and technology ability, whose level directly influences the quality and time of job completion. Different from hard skills, soft skills emphasize the interaction of persons, and non-technical operations related to work. If hard skills are the open sesame to find jobs, soft skills are related to students’ long, continual and healthy development. Students with good soft skills, have continual learning ability, multidisciplinary problem-solving ability and good personal relationship and they will be more competitive in the long vocational development.

The main content of soft skills is extensive, including six points as follows:

1. Teamwork ability
   Teamwork ability is on the common basis to organize people, concentrating on each person in the suitable position who tries his best, helps with each other, shares resources, plays the most efficiency of team and gets along with members in the team instead of emphasizing the personal excellence.

2. Communication ability
   Communication ability means clearly and precisely expressing personal opinions, encouraging others and having the ability of persuasion and public calls.

3. Continual learning ability
   Students have internal driving force of acquiring new knowledge and new technology, only in this way they can follow the change of times and possess the ability of self-innovation and self-development.

4. Problem-solving ability
   Besides professional knowledge, it contains comprehensively professional knowledge and experience. Students can propose rational solutions through analyzing problems.

5. Innovation ability
   Students continually innovate and learn, put forward new solutions to solve old or new problems. People with innovation ability will become more and more popular with enterprises.

The Setting-up of Students’ Soft Skills Cultivation Modes in Higher Vocational Colleges

According to the analysis of the status of students’ soft skills cultivation modes in higher vocational colleges, it can be seen that the current cultivation mode cannot meet the society and enterprises’ requirements of students. Improving students’ soft skills in higher vocational colleges can not only increase the students' employment rate, but also lays a basis for students long better vocational development. In the soft skills cultivation, several aspects can be taken into account:

The Revision of Curriculum Design

Firstly, add and open humanity courses and universal courses.

The real situation of paying more attention to hard skills and neglecting soft skills leads to colleges paying more attention to opening applied courses and technical courses and undervaluing the universal courses and humanity courses. They should add and open humanistic quality courses, safety education, mental health, communication technical courses according to the specific conditions of majors. Hard skills and soft skills are not counter posed, but complement each other. The improvement of soft skills techniques promotes students learning hard skills.

Secondly, adjust the training courses.

The purpose of opening training courses is a kind of practical teaching to improve students’ operation levels. But when students improve their practical operations levels, they can improve their own soft skills also, so the practical training time should be lengthened. In the process of practical training, teachers usually adopt the method of grouping, generally 6-8 persons a group charging a
project. In practical practice, each person in the group has different labor divisions, some in charge of finding resources, some in charge of specific operations, and some in charge of recording data. Students can improve teamwork ability, communication ability, the application of professional knowledge and soft skills acquiring new knowledge in this way.

When setting up practical courses, the college organizes students of different majors and meantime it opens similar practical training courses. The management of students in colleges usually takes class as a unit, so students of the same class have classes and live together, and it's difficult to know students of other classes. In the practical training, the class setting is disrupted and different classes are combined together. Previously unknown students become group members within a week to two weeks and complete practical training programs together, which has a same level with the practical work. This method is of great help to cultivate students' soft skills.

Lastly, open online courses by utilizing the convenience of Internet, especially quality education, culture quality education, academic lectures or other online video courses, to provide great convenience for students to learn.

The Cultivation of Teachers

In traditional higher vocational colleges, teachers attach importance to the curriculum that can be checked by quantification, such as theoretical teaching and practical operations. When ending courses, teachers mostly use grades to evaluate students, and when teaching class, they basically seldom consider how to improve students’ soft skills. Therefore, it is required for teachers to strengthen the importance of soft skills, teaching methods, and the cultivation of evaluation to meet the requirements of modern society and enterprises to students. At the same time, as a vocation, with the improvement of their own soft skills level, teachers should improve comprehensive quality accordingly. Optimize teachers team structure and construct a professional teaching team with double-teacher structure by inducing part-time teachers in enterprises and moral education instructors outside school. Professional teachers with teaching reform questions can go to the enterprises’ line to practice, accumulate practical materials and improve practical ability, aiming to enhancing the curriculum developing ability and constructing ability.

The Establishment of Social Practical Training Base

Practical training courses can not only improve students’ soft skills and hard skills, but also enhance students’ comprehensive quality. However, at present, higher vocational colleges have some problems, such as inadequate practical training space, old equipment, practical training teachers’ roles played by school teachers and so on. To solve these problems, on the one hand, invest a large sum of money to establish large-scale training base and upgrade equipment; on the other hand, more importantly, employ relevant employees in enterprises as training teachers. It can not only teach students technical knowledge which is required by enterprises, but also cultivate students’ soft skills from the angle of enterprises.

To sum up, the status that higher vocational colleges pay little attention to cultivating students’ soft skills urgently needs to be changed. The core of cultivating students’ soft skills is to improve student teamwork ability, communication ability, continual learning ability, problem solving ability. Through continual innovation and improvement of curriculum design, cultivating teachers, establishing social practical training bases, the purpose of cultivating personnel with high quality and high-level techniques can be achieved.

References

[1] Information on http://www.moe.edu.cn

