

# A Study on Strategies to Enhance Students' Employability in Vocational Institutions

Mengke Guo\*

*School of Economics and Management, Beijing Polytechnic, Beijing, China*

*\*Corresponding Author*

**Abstract:** In recent years vocational education has seen rapid development in China. Vocational education is increasingly emphasizing the integration of industry and education to enhance students' employability. With the expansion of vocational education, ensuring the quality of education and the relevance of training is a challenge that requires a study of the current status and problems in the development of employability of students in vocational colleges and universities, as well as effective strategies to improve them. The overall level of employability of vocational college graduates is rather average, and we need to come up with appropriate strategies to adapt to the constant changes in the job market and the economy and society. This paper proposes a series of improvement measures for the employability of students in higher vocational colleges, discussing that students should improve their professional knowledge, communication and interpersonal skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, innovation, emotional regulation, self-awareness and self-management, and teamwork skills.

**Keywords:** Vocational Education; Employability; Strategies to Enhance Employability; the Integration of Industry and Education

## 1. Introduction

Vocational education in China is experiencing rapid and positive development. The Chinese government has been committed to promoting the development of vocational education and has formulated a series of policies to support the development of vocational colleges and universities, as well as encouraging enterprises to participate in vocational education, promoting the integration of industry and education, and facilitating the interface

between technology and industry in order to meet market demand. The development of vocational education has brought a series of opportunities and challenges, which may have a profound impact on individuals, enterprises, and the entire society. The development of vocational education is expected to improve the skill levels of graduates and increase their competitiveness in the job market, thereby increasing employment opportunities. The integration of vocational education with actual industries can promote vocational education to better meet market demand, help industrial upgrading, and promote economic development. Vocational education provides students with more practical skills and knowledge, which helps to develop more entrepreneurs and promote innovation and entrepreneurship. By introducing advanced international vocational education concepts and practices, China is expected to improve its technological level, cultivate more technical and skilled talents, and enhance international competitiveness. Vocational education is expected to bring stability to the society by providing more employment opportunities and meeting the demand for various types of skills in the society <sup>[1]</sup>.

The development of vocational education not only brings opportunities for individuals, enterprises, and the whole society, but also inevitably brings challenges <sup>[2,3]</sup>. There may be imbalances in the distribution of resources for vocational education, resulting in some regions or groups facing more limited access. Some industries may face challenges brought about by technological changes and automation, leading to a decrease in demand for certain professions and greater uncertainty in the job market. Some industries have fast technological updates, and vocational education needs to keep up with the pace of technological development to ensure that students acquire the latest knowledge and

skills. Compared with traditional undergraduate education, vocational education may still have some gaps in terms of social recognition, and there is a need to strengthen the publicity and promotion of vocational education<sup>[4]</sup>.

Vocational education is increasingly focusing on the interface with actual industries to ensure that students' education is closely linked to market demand. Vocational institutions should strengthen their co-operation with enterprises to provide students with more practical skills and knowledge so as to enhance their competitiveness in employment. The current stage of economic development in the country has increased the demand for skilled labor and skilled workers. Therefore, vocational institutions need to strengthen skills training for their students, including training in various crafts, technologies and service industries. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research on students' employability.

The concept of employability was first proposed by Beveridge (1906)<sup>[5]</sup>. Some scholars refer to employability as employ ability. Scholars agree that employability is an individual's ability to get and keep a job. At the beginning of the 20th century, the field of vocational education research gradually emerged, and scholars began to pay attention to the employment of students in vocational colleges and universities. In this process, some scholars and institutions have gradually begun to study the employability of students in vocational colleges and universities in order to better meet market demands. In China, especially after the reform and opening up, research on vocational education has gradually deepened, and research on the employability of students in vocational colleges and universities has also been strengthened<sup>[6]</sup>. A number of colleges and universities, research institutes and government departments at home and abroad are actively exploring ways to enhance the employability of students in vocational colleges and universities and to promote their better adaptation to the needs of society and the market<sup>[7][8]</sup>. In the CNKI database, all the journals were searched precisely by using "subject" as the search field and "employability" and "vocational education" as the search term. After selecting "Chinese core journals", 223 valid documents were obtained. In the Web of Science database, 1122 articles

were obtained after noise processing with "employability" and "vocational education" as the subject term and "Article" or "Review" as the document type (the cut-off date was Oct. 23, 2023). In general, there are more qualitative studies on employability, and fewer quantitative requirements on strategies to enhance employability.

With the expansion of vocational education, ensuring the quality of education and the relevance of training is a challenge that requires a study of the current status and problems in the development of employability of students in vocational colleges and universities, as well as effective strategies to improve them.

## 2. Status and Problems

The study of employability has gradually become an important topic in the field of vocational education as the expectations and requirements for students in vocational colleges and universities are constantly being adjusted in response to the constant changes in society and economy. The overall level of employability of higher education graduates is average. According to the feedback from employers, most business managers believe that the overall job application ability of higher vocational graduates is average. Higher vocational graduates did not cherish the learning opportunities in the process of school learning before, did not have a solid grasp of basic professional knowledge, and were not able to perform well in other performance aspects, did not know how to express themselves and did not know how to build on their strengths and avoid their weaknesses. The employability of senior graduates will affect their future employment.

First, the professional knowledge ability of students in higher vocational colleges and universities is general and needs to be improved. Enterprises attach importance to students' professional foundation, but the difference between the professional foundation of the same profession is not too big, and what is more valued is the students' independent learning ability and the ability beyond the professional foundation. Secondly, the communication and communication abilities of vocational college graduates need to be strengthened. It is inevitable to interact with people in the workplace, and communication

skills are also an important factor in the composition of employability. Most companies explicitly require graduates to have good communication and communication skills in their job requirements, which is a necessary ability to achieve good results in future work. Some students are afraid of communicating with others due to their own personality, and their communication skills need to be strengthened. Thirdly, the level of analysis and problem-solving ability of graduates of higher vocational colleges and universities is not so good, and they can only analyze and judge general things. Having good analytical and problem-solving skills will enable students to make clear judgements and choices in complex matters and to deal with complicated things more smoothly, which will improve their employability. Fourth, the overall level of innovation ability of graduates of higher vocational colleges and universities is average. If they know how to innovate at work and test the scientific and realistic nature of their innovative ideas in practice, it is not only conducive to the employment and entrepreneurship of higher vocational students, which is related to the long-term development of young people in the future, but also conducive to helping enterprises to develop healthily for a long time, so the sense of innovation is also more important to employers. Fifth, the emotional regulation ability of vocational college graduates is not very good. The current fierce competition in society has put new demands on the work ability of college graduates. With the increase of employment pressure, graduates will also face some difficulties and setbacks in finding a job, and even if they enter the job position, they will not be completely satisfied. This requires vocational college students to have good psychological regulation ability. Overall, the emotional regulation ability of most vocational college students is not very good, which is also an obstacle to their employability improvement and will have a negative impact on their future job search. Sixth, the majority of vocational college graduates currently have average levels of self-awareness. Being able to accurately understand and evaluate oneself, recognize one's strengths and weaknesses, is also an ability that vocational students need to improve. Graduates should have the ability to test their own value by reviewing past

experiences, form objective and comprehensive evaluations of themselves, and deeply analyze themselves. Seventh, the overall self-management ability of vocational college graduates is at an average level. Self-management ability is a fundamental quality that needs to be possessed in work. Most vocational college students have average self-management abilities and are sometimes influenced by some online information and negative factors. Only if you are strict with yourself and have a good sense of self-discipline, you will be able to excel in your future work, and business managers pay particular attention to this ability in their students. Eighth, the teamwork ability of vocational college graduates needs to be improved. Everyone in the workplace cannot do without a team, and students need to learn to cooperate with others and achieve team goals through the joint efforts of multiple individuals. Therefore, team cooperation ability is also important employment ability for vocational college graduates. Many companies use leaderless group discussions or team games when recruiting to assess the team collaboration ability of graduates. Not understanding how to collaborate in a team is not enough to complete the work well. Enterprises are made up of several departments to complete a work task together, every link of error or delay will affect the efficiency of the whole task, if the graduates do not have a collective concept, there is no sense of cooperation will affect the work of the whole enterprise. The essence of teamwork is common dedication, the power of a team is much greater than the power of a person, in an enterprise, the team can only give full play to the team's power if everyone is constantly sharing their strengths and communicating all problems in a timely manner.

### **3. Strategies to Improve Employability**

This article proposes corresponding strategies to improve the employability of vocational college graduates in response to the problems they face in terms of employability.

Firstly, improving the professional knowledge ability of students in higher vocational colleges and universities is an important and urgent task because it is directly related to the competitiveness and adaptability of students in the workplace <sup>[9]</sup>. The following are some

suggestions to facilitate the enhancement of the professional knowledge capacity of students in tertiary institutions. Vocational institutions can constantly update their teaching content to ensure that the professional knowledge taught is in sync with the development of the industry. By paying close attention to industry trends and making timely adjustments to the curriculum, students can be exposed to the latest and most practical knowledge. Vocational institutions can introduce more practical courses and internships so that students can apply their theoretical knowledge to practical work. Practical experience helps deepen the understanding of professional knowledge and develop students' practical skills. Further enhancement of university-enterprise co-operation provides students with opportunities to participate in real projects and practical work to improve their professional real-world experience. The participation of enterprise mentors also helps to help students better understand the needs of practical work. Modern technological means are utilised to provide rich online learning resources, including video tutorials and online experiments, so that students can pursue more in-depth learning outside the classroom. Encourage students to develop independent learning skills by teaching them how to proactively acquire and organise professional knowledge. This can be achieved through training in the ability to retrieve and analyse information, the ability to read academic literature, and so on. Encourage students to participate in competitions and projects related to their majors, which can not only hone their professional knowledge, but also enhance teamwork and problem-solving skills. Schools can organise lectures, seminars or academic activities related to their majors and invite industry experts to share their experiences to stimulate students' interest in professional knowledge. These measures can be implemented in synergy to enhance students' professional knowledge so that they can better meet the needs of their future career development. In addition, students themselves need to enhance their own learning outside the classroom, focusing on practical operations to continuously improve their professionalism. Secondly, improving the communication skills of graduates of tertiary institutions is crucial to

their success in the workplace. Higher vocational colleges and universities should add special courses related to communication in their curricula, including training in oral expression, written communication, teamwork, etc., and allow students to practice their communication skills in the classroom through real-life cases and role-playing. Schools organise mock interviews on a regular basis to help students improve their ability to express themselves and cope with pressure, and provide professional feedback so that students can understand their problems in communication and make improvements. Team projects are arranged during the school year to encourage students to co-operate in completing tasks. By co-operating with their peers, students can improve their teamwork and communication skills and better understand others' perspectives and communication styles. Vocational institutions should organise a large number of practical activities, such as social practice and volunteer services, to enable students to improve their communication skills in actual social situations, and such practice will help to develop their communication resilience in various environments. Schools should invite professionals or psychologists to organise lectures and workshops on communication skills and sociability, so that students can learn practical skills and strategies from the experience of professionals. Vocational institutions are required to provide language training programmes to help students improve their expressive language skills. This may include speaking classes, writing classes, and so on, in order to improve students' verbal communication skills. At the same time, effective feedback mechanisms, including feedback from peers and teachers, should be established to give students timely feedback on their performance in communication and guide them to improve and enhance it. Create opportunities to introduce real-life cases for analysis and discussion in teaching, so that students can learn to observe, understand and apply different communication styles, and improve their communication analysis and problem-solving skills. Encourage students to actively participate in social networking and communicate with classmates, teachers and industry professionals through online platforms. This can expand their social circle

while improving their online communication skills. Through the above comprehensive training and practice, graduates from tertiary institutions will be better equipped with communication and social skills to enhance their competitiveness in the workplace.

Thirdly, it is very important to enhance the analytical and problem-solving abilities of graduates of tertiary institutions, as these are skills that are essential when facing complex situations and challenges in the workplace. Vocational institutions need to introduce project-based learning in their programmes, so that students can participate in actual projects and solve real-life problems. This type of learning can develop students' practical skills and problem-solving experience. Introducing real-life cases to students so that they can learn to extract problems from real-life situations, analyse the causes of the problems and propose feasible solutions will help develop their problem identification and solving skills. Organise as many team projects as possible and encourage students to work together to solve problems. By collaborating with their classmates, students will be able to view problems from multiple perspectives and learn to listen to and accept different opinions. Encourage students to engage in interdisciplinary learning and to be exposed to different fields of knowledge, which will help broaden their thinking and enhance their comprehensive problem-solving skills. Schools should provide students with internship opportunities as far as possible, so that they can face and solve problems in real work. Practical experience hones students' practical application skills and gives them a deeper understanding of industry issues. Adopting problem-oriented teaching methods in teaching, i.e. guiding students to learn relevant knowledge and skills by posing practical problems, will help to cultivate students' awareness of active problem solving. Provide students with opportunities for academic research and engage them in practical research projects, which helps to develop their ability to analyze problems, design experiments and summarize conclusions. Establishing a mentor system whereby mentors guide students to conduct independent research and solve practical problems, and the experience and guidance of mentors help students to learn the methods of problem analysis and solution

more systematically. Through these measures, graduates of tertiary institutions will be better equipped with the ability to analyze and solve problems, laying a solid foundation for their future career development.

Fourthly, enhancing the innovation capacity of graduates of higher education institutions is an important task in preparing students to adapt to a rapidly changing and innovative professional environment. Schools and teachers design innovative programmes, teach innovative methods and tools, and cultivate students' problem-solving and innovative thinking. Teachers can use innovative teaching methods, such as heuristics, case studies, and design thinking, to stimulate students' innovative thinking. Students are encouraged to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration and work with students from different disciplines. This helps students think from multiple perspectives and expand their innovative thinking. Provide makerspaces and laboratories to provide an environment for students to experiment freely and try out new ideas. This helps to stimulate students' creativity. Encourage students to take part in innovation competitions to provide a platform for displaying and sharing innovative achievements, and participation in competitions can stimulate students' motivation to innovate. Through the comprehensive application of these measures, tertiary institutions can effectively enhance the innovation ability of their graduates, so that they can better adapt to the challenges of future career development.

Fifthly, enhancing the emotional regulation of graduates of tertiary institutions is an important part of paying attention to students' career development. Vocational institutions should offer courses on emotion management or mental health to help students understand the importance of emotion regulation and learn practical emotion management skills, including emotion expression and conflict resolution. Provide students with mental health services, including psychological counselling and psychosocial guidance, so that students have the opportunity to share their emotional problems and receive professional guidance. To organise workshops on emotion management on a regular basis to help students enhance their practical skills in emotion regulation through practical activities and group discussions. To help students build up

an awareness of their emotions and understand what triggers their emotions, so that they can better master the methods of emotion regulation. Teach students effective stress management skills, including time management, goal setting, relaxation techniques, etc., to help them better cope with stressful situations. Encourage participation in physical activities. Exercise helps release tension and improve physical fitness, which has a positive impact on emotion regulation. Encourage students to establish a positive social network, build supportive relationships with classmates and friends, share each other's emotional experiences, and gain understanding and support. Teach students conflict resolution skills, including effective communication, compromise, negotiation, etc., to help them deal with emotional conflicts that may arise in interpersonal relationships. Schools can raise students' awareness of mental health through regular mental health promotion activities and themed lectures, prompting them to take the initiative to pay attention to their emotional state. These measures can help graduates of higher vocational colleges to better understand and manage their emotions and improve their ability to regulate their emotions, so that they can better adapt to the challenges of the workplace<sup>[10]</sup>.

Sixthly, there are some suggestions for improving the self-knowledge of graduates of higher vocational colleges and universities. Higher vocational colleges and universities should offer special courses on self-awareness, including such aspects as getting to know oneself, understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses, and setting personal goals, so as to cultivate students' awareness of themselves through systematic courses. Students are encouraged to reflect after practical internships, projects and courses to think about how they have performed, what they have achieved and the difficulties they have faced during the process. This helps to raise the level of awareness about oneself. Implementing a 360-degree feedback mechanism, which includes collecting feedback from peers, teachers, tutors and themselves, multi-dimensional feedback helps students to have a comprehensive understanding of their performance. Guiding students in career planning at the beginning of their studies, allowing them to think about their interests, values and career goals, which

helps them to have a clearer picture of their career direction. Provide personality assessment tools to help students understand their personality traits, which helps them better understand their behavioural patterns, interpersonal tendencies, etc. To help students set clear personal and career goals and analyse the steps and skills required to achieve them. Clarity of goals helps students develop themselves in a more focused manner. Encourage students to conduct regular self-evaluation to review their performance in areas such as learning, career development and interpersonal relationships. Through continuous reflection, they can identify their growth points and room for improvement. Psychological counselling services are provided to help students resolve their psychological barriers, and encourage them to gain a deeper understanding of their emotions and needs. The importance of self-management is stressed in education, including time management, goal setting, priority setting, etc. These skills help students to better organise and plan their lives and studies. Through these measures, graduates of tertiary institutions will be able to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of themselves, laying a solid foundation for personal and professional development.

Seventh, enhancing the teamwork skills of graduates of higher education institutions is a key training direction, as teamwork is an important factor for success in a professional environment. Design courses or projects to encourage students to work in teams. Regularly organise team-building activities, including outdoor development and team games, which can help improve trust and willingness to co-operate among students. Regularly share successful cases of teamwork to stimulate students' interest and confidence in teamwork. Encourage students to participate in actual team projects and internships so that they can experience and improve their teamwork skills in a real work environment. Through the combined use of these methods, graduates from higher education institutions will be better able to adapt to the professional environment and possess excellent teamwork skills.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper proposes a series of improvement measures for the employability of students in higher vocational colleges, arguing that students should improve their professional knowledge, communication and interpersonal skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, innovation, emotional regulation, self-awareness and self-management, and teamwork skills.

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