

# A Preliminary Study on the Career Development Path for Higher Vocational Teachers of Professional Basic Courses in the Context of "Double Quality"

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## **Abstract:**

As we pay attention to the "double quality" improvement of teachers in vocational colleges and require the "necessity and sufficiency" of vocational education theoretical knowledge, higher vocational teachers of professional basic courses encounter career dilemmas such as coexistence of overload and shortage of teaching workload, difficulty in seeking curriculum construction opportunities, difficulty in carrying out horizontal project research, and limited qualifications for participation in skill competitions. This paper proposes paths for higher vocational teachers of professional basic courses to cope with these difficulties and seek career development, including improving teaching ability, breaking through the limitations of professional background, broadening the path for "one specialty with multiple skills"; overcoming the inertia of teaching, extensively connecting courses, and carefully organizing classrooms and textbooks; joining the research team to improve the theoretical level of the subject; developing areas with potential achievement based on student needs.

**Keywords:** *Vocational education, Professional basic course, Teacher, Career dilemma, Career development.*

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## **I. BACKGROUND ANALYSIS**

In August 2019, the "Implementation Plan for Deepening the Construction of "Double-Quality" Teachers in Vocational Education in the New Era" issued by the Ministry of Education and other four departments in August 2019 stated: "since 2020, except for graduates of 'double quality' vocational technical education major, teachers are basically no longer recruited from fresh graduates without more than three years of work experience in an industry or enterprise", which clearly puts forward the requirement that vocational education teachers must possess technical skills. However, before the release of the "Implementation Plan", most teachers in vocational colleges were fresh graduates who were directly recruited into vocational colleges after graduation from colleges and universities [1], including graduates of vocational and technical normal colleges, graduates of ordinary normal colleges, and graduates of other science and engineering or comprehensive colleges. They not necessarily possess the technical skills for the subject they teaching. Teachers in higher vocational colleges who undertake professional basic course

teaching tasks generally have relatively solid professional basic theoretical knowledge, but in terms of professional skills and practical experience, they are relatively weak compared to professional core course teachers.

At the same time, to theoretical content, there is an orientation of "necessary and sufficient" in vocational education, generate a general phenomenon that the professional theoretical content become reduced. In this context, due to the high proportion of theoretical content in professional basic courses in higher vocational colleges, there will be a phenomenon of shortened class hour. Moreover, professional basic courses have many theoretical contents with much knowledge amount, many concepts, nouns, terms and formulas, and strong theoretical property. Students generally feel boring, abstract, difficulty in learning, thus lacking interest, not knowing how it will be useful in the future. In addition, professional basic courses' significance is not reflected in the talent cultivation plan, which results students in insufficient mastery of the content of professional basic courses, especially the theoretical content.

The policy document proposes requirements for teachers' practical ability and students show unsatisfactory learning effect. Under such dual background, the existing higher vocational teachers of professional basic courses will inevitably encounter different types of career dilemmas when pursuing career development [2]. This paper will conduct a preliminary exploration into how to deal with these difficulties and help teachers seek professional development.

## **II. ANALYSIS OF THE CAREER DILEMMA OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL TEACHERS OF PROFESSIONAL BASIC COURSES**

Higher vocational education should allow students to "know why it is" on the basis of "knowing what it is" in secondary vocational education. Professional skills learning is a process of "knowing what it is", while professional theory learning is a process of "knowing why it is". Higher vocational students have a relatively deep grasp of professional theoretical knowledge, so the senior technical personnel cultivated by higher vocational colleges can adapt to more difficult positions demanding higher technical content. This is the embodiment of "higher education" and also reflects the advantage of school-based learning [3]. Professional basic courses are the prerequisite courses in the curriculum system of colleges and universities that lay the necessary foundation for the study of professional core courses [4], which are the courses that train students to "learn" [5]. Therefore, professional basic courses play a very important role in the entire professional study of higher vocational students, and serve as a connecting link between the preceding and the following. The professional basic course teachers shoulder the important task of laying the foundation of "necessary and sufficient" professional theory for students.

Teachers who undertake the teaching tasks of professional core courses in higher vocational colleges are mainly from corporate technical backbones, graduates of vocational and technical normal colleges, or graduates of other counterpart majors. That is, the majors they teach and the majors they learn or the industries they are engaged in are basically linked. Differently, some teachers currently undertaking professional basic course teaching tasks in higher vocational colleges are the same as the professional core

course teachers whose majors taught are basically linked with the majors learned. However, there is another part of the professional basic course teachers whose majors taught are fewer linked with the majors learned. Since the two majors have some overlapping fields, those capable of the teaching tasks of related courses in such field are then hired.

However, teaching work is not the sole standard for measuring teachers' work and career development. The current common methods for measuring teachers' career development mainly include daily performance evaluation and professional title evaluation, and the current performance evaluation and professional title evaluation system of higher vocational colleges are usually formulated by each school itself. The related contents generally cover qualifications, commendations, business titles, teaching workload, teaching quality, curriculum construction, teaching research, papers, vertical/horizontal projects, patents, skill competitions, etc. Teachers need to do something in these areas in order to improve their work performance and pursue professional title promotion. In addition to daily teaching, course construction, and professional construction tasks, professional core course teachers also implement a large number of horizontal project researches, and undertake skills competition guidance work. On the other hand, the daily work of professional basic course teachers mainly centers round theoretical teaching and related research, so it is difficult to carry out part of the work in the assessment requirements. If the above weaknesses in performance evaluation and professional title evaluation are not well dealt with, it will cause dilemma in the career development of professional basic course teachers.

### 2.1 Overload of Teaching Workload and Dissatisfaction Coexist

As mentioned earlier, the reduction in the class hours of professional basic courses will inevitably result in a reduction in the total teaching workload of professional basic courses. Teachers with "one specialty and multiple skills" can quickly adapt to this change and shift the focus of teaching subjects. However, for some teachers good at theoretical teaching, at the beginning of their careers when the class hour of professional basic courses is not reduced, they are determined to teach professional basic courses as the focus of their work, with daily theoretical teaching as the main work. Without shifting their focus in time, they will be not enough with the teaching workload after the reduction. In particular, for professional basic course teachers whose majors taught are fewer linked with the majors learned, there will be no more courses allowing one to undertake teaching tasks in the majors taught. In this way, path for "one specialty with multiple skills" is originally relatively narrow. Since some teachers shift their focus of work, the remaining professional basic course teachers will experience an overload of teaching workload during the semester set up the taught professional basic courses. However, in semester not set up the taught professional basic courses, they are likely to be given teaching tasks of cultural foundation courses or other courses that are not very professional. The arrangement of the teaching tasks in these cultural or less professional courses is not stable. In the teaching years absent from such courses, the teachers will be not enough with the teaching workload; in the teaching years with such courses, the teachers need do a lot work to get familiar with the new course.

## 2.2 Curriculum Construction Project Opportunities are Difficult to Obtain

Due to different subject characteristics of different majors, some professional basic courses are simple theoretical courses, and some are courses that combine theory and practice, but the theoretical content accounts for a large proportion. The former is like the "Biochemistry" course offered by medical majors. The main teaching goal is to lay the theoretical knowledge foundation for the subsequent professional courses, so the content emphasizes theory and has relatively small practical content. For the latter, Yang Zhongping discussed as early as 1997 that in the teaching of "Mechanical Design Fundamentals", teachers should accumulate experience and teaching materials directly from practice, so that the grasp of "necessary and sufficient" theoretical teaching is ideal [6]. At present, the vocational education industry is actively advocating innovative curriculum construction methods such as the integration of production and education, school-enterprise cooperation, integration of work and learning, integration of theory and practice, project-based teaching, loose-leaf/manual new textbooks, etc. which suit the latter type of professional basic courses, and teachers' participation is encouraged, but it does not suit the former type of professional basic courses, and teachers cannot make a difference.

On the whole, more limited curriculum construction projects and funds of all levels and types will be allocated to professional core courses, which indeed will provide good resources and hardware guarantees for students' professional learning. At the same time, in the process of construction, the participating teachers have devoted a lot of time and energy, also harvesting a lot of construction results, which adds weight to personal performance and professional title evaluation. Therefore, professional basic courses can acquire fewer curriculum construction opportunities than professional core courses, and professional basic course teachers are less chance to harvest the results of curriculum construction.

## 2.3 Difficulty in Carrying out Horizontal Projects

In January 2019, the "National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan" issued by the State Council pointed out: "Vocational colleges should actively cooperate with qualified enterprises in talent training, technological innovation, employment and entrepreneurship, social service, cultural inheritance in accordance with their own characteristics and talent training needs." In accordance with the spirit of the document, various higher vocational colleges have formulated supporting incentive policies to encourage teachers to participate in various forms of school-enterprise cooperation. Many professional core course teachers from vocational colleges personally take actions, using their expertise in technical training, patent research and development, and equipment improvement to serve the front line of enterprise production and construction.

However, at this time, regardless of whether the taught majors are consistent with their learned majors or not, professional basic course teachers have been teaching basic professional knowledge for years, gradually deviating from the development frontier of their majors, and spending a lot of time to prepare for the new course due to unstable teaching tasks. It is difficult for them to have the time and energy to engage in scientific research. Studies have also shown that more professional basic course teachers in higher

vocational colleges host and participate in teaching research projects than those hosting and participating in scientific research projects [7]. Therefore, it is difficult for higher vocational teachers of professional basic courses to carry out horizontal projects of cooperation with enterprises.

#### 2.4 Less Participation in Skills Competition Activities

A small-scale survey result shows that very few professional basic course teachers have the opportunity to guide students in skill competitions [7]. However, the more common situation is that professional basic course teachers have equal opportunities to participate in teaching ability competitions and informatization teaching competitions with professional core course teachers, but have significantly fewer opportunities to participate in professional skills competitions than professional core course teachers. On the one hand, at the beginning of their careers, teachers who choose to teach professional basic courses have good theoretical proficiency in the ability structure, but their professional skills may be worse than those who choose professional core courses. In particular, some professional basic course teachers whose taught majors are fewer linked with learned majors do not possess the skills required for the majors they teach. On the other hand, professional core course teachers have been engaged in professional core course teaching for years. Through repeated practice, their professional skills continuously grow in the process of teaching and student guidance.

At the same time, the skills competition held for students of vocational colleges has built a platform for students to learn and display their skills. After winning the award, students can also make impressive performance in professional positions. The skills competition serves the industry upgrading. Moreover, the advanced concepts, teaching standards, competition equipment, and tutorial materials of the competition are also implemented in professional construction and classroom teaching [8]. Students' success is inseparable from the hard work of the instructors, while instructors can also receive commendation from the competition and therefore promote teaching work. For the same reasons as above, those able to guide students in skill competition are definitely professional core course teachers, rather than professional basic course teachers, so this is an almost unsolvable dilemma for professional basic course teachers.

### **III. CAREER DEVELOPMENT PATH FOR HIGHER VOCATIONAL TEACHERS OF PROFESSIONAL BASIC COURSES**

Under the influence of different majors, different curriculum characteristics, and the specific operation methods of different schools, the career dilemmas may be different for each professional basic courses teacher of higher vocational colleges in his career. There are different ways to cope with these dilemmas.

#### 3.1 Improve Teaching Ability, Break through the Limitations of Professional Background, and Broaden the Path for "One Specialty with Multiple Skills"

Teachers of professional basic courses are overloaded with the teaching workload during the semester set up the courses they teach, but the teaching workload is insufficient in the semester without the

corresponding courses, so teachers temporarily give teaching and prepare new courses, creating heavy burden. In view of this, teachers of professional basic courses need consciously improve teaching ability, change from passive to active, find the target course in the future despite the unstable teaching arrangement, and develop this course into their second "major". There is often a shortage of teachers for courses that are temporarily taught. If the teachers assigned to teach temporarily can devote themselves to the process of self-study, observation, lesson preparation, polishing, feedback, etc., and treat each lesson carefully, then after several rounds of teaching, it is entirely possible for the teacher to excel in the course. The good reputation of the teaching effect will gradually stabilize the arrangement of teaching tasks.

Teaching ability contains a large number of abilities universal for different subjects, so this is a relatively easy career development path for professional basic course teachers. According to Xu Guoqing's teaching field theory [9], the teaching field of teachers at the elementary ability level is self-centered and teachers pay more attention to how to meet the teaching implementation requirements. Teachers at this stage are mainly young teachers inexperienced in teaching, whose career dilemmas have long been concerned [10]. However, intermediate level teachers and senior level teachers with curriculum-centered or even student-centered teaching field have more transferable capabilities in the teaching process, so they are not bounded by professional backgrounds. Instead, they find teaching courses suitable for their career development, and find breakthrough to "one specialty with multiple skills".

For example, in classroom teaching, the use of multimedia teaching methods has become popular, but the resulting convenience makes teachers lazy, so there is no consideration about innovation in content organization, practical connections, and teaching methods. Imagine that a teacher uses a traditional blackboard to teach, selects practical cases to introduce and organize the teaching content, gives lesson attractively; another teacher has used the PPT courseware matched with the textbook for years, and makes no modification due to the copyright limitations, so the same content is taught in parallel several times, gradually leaving the same language that is repeated mechanically. Which of the two teachers is more popular with students? The answer is self-evident. Therefore, advanced teaching methods are essential for high-quality classroom effects. Common excellent teachers in teaching practice use simple teaching courseware, with some contents only presented in a few lines of titles. Students do not need to be busy copying and taking pictures, but concentrate on the teacher's teaching, even achieving shallow hypnosis. After listening to the teacher's clear explanation, students not only gain an understanding and memory of the learning content, but also have an insight into how to use it in the future. Of course, multimedia also has its clear advantages. For example, in some majors, the professional basic courses include a large number of charts, and PPT courseware can more efficiently display the teaching content. Hence, solid basic teaching skills, coupled with good use of multimedia to serve teaching, rather than limiting the thinking and practice of teaching, is the direction for professional basic course teachers to sum up experience in teaching practice and continuously improve their teaching ability.

### 3.2 Overcome Teaching Inertia, Extensively Link Courses, Carefully Organize Classrooms and Prepare Teaching Materials

Teachers who have been teaching the same course for years have accumulated rich teaching experience, but will inevitably form inertia in the teaching process, gradually reducing the time for lesson preparation, and repeatedly using the same teaching plan or the same courseware for years. However, according to Zankov's developmental teaching theory, teaching has two tasks. The first is to enable students to seek development, and the second is to enable students to master knowledge and skills [11]. Over time, students are changing, science and technology are changing, and teaching should also change accordingly. This requires teachers to overcome their own inertia, closely link with practice development, make careful preparation before class, effectively organize the class, and make reasonable evaluation after class. Higher vocational teachers of professional basic courses can do this from the following aspects.

#### 3.2.1 Compile practical teaching materials with concise language and brief content

At present, the textbooks of many professional basic courses still follow the compilation method of the subject system. This is related to the more theoretical content but less practical content in the course. The course itself is not suitable for development into project course, so it is not recommended to compile new loose-leaf or manual type teaching materials. However, newly published textbooks constantly appear on the market, but most of them are severely homogenized. Compared with traditional textbooks, they are not improved much, merely a compressed version of undergraduate textbooks. Higher vocational teachers of professional basic courses should compile textbooks more suitable for students in vocational colleges, and express them in words that match the students' cognitive abilities. The content should be not limited to the original subject structure, but there is no need to excessively pursue the comprehensiveness of the original knowledge content. It should organically incorporate contents such as practical cases, work scenarios, professional culture, cutting-edge progress to stimulate students' learning interest. There is need to extensively explore knowledge points related to other follow-up courses, which should be reflected in the textbooks in advance to remind students of the importance of professional basic courses. Such new textbooks with rebuilt structure can, to a certain extent, change students' fear in the face of excessive theories, help students master professional basic knowledge and lay a solid foundation for subsequent professional core courses. The textbooks compiled in this way will inevitably become important materials that reflect the performance and professional abilities of teachers of professional basic courses.

#### 3.2.2 Organize the classroom with the students' needs as the center

The content of professional basic courses has strong systematicity, stability, practicality and interrelation [12]. If students lack clear learning goals and receive poor learning effect, they will be disconnected with subsequent courses. As professional basic courses are generally given before professional core courses, students are not yet exposed to the course learning of their major at this time, but professional basic courses have much theoretical content, making it not easy to directly stimulate students' interest. In this way, it is difficult for students to give due attention and understanding. How to

improve students' learning interest based on students' long-term career needs has become the key to the solution. Therefore, teachers of professional basic courses should pay attention to how to make good use of the limited class hours to lay a good foundation for students.

First of all, teachers should not only pursue the subject integrity and hurriedly explain the complex knowledge according to the inherent logic of the subject. Instead, they should bravely break the original knowledge structure in the teaching and rebuild the teaching system, including the setting of teaching goals, the coverage and arrangement of knowledge points, the selection of practical application scenarios, the description of the relationship with current occupations and job specifications, etc. Secondly, the attention to the discipline frontiers should be linked to the students' majors, follow-up course learning, future job needs, and teaching practice, etc. Third, it is possible to vigorously explore the content linking professional basic courses with follow-up professional core courses, arouse students' attention by relating to the professional core course contents in the professional basic courses in advance. Fourth, it is necessary to continuously look for education materials in social sciences, organically combine it with the teaching content of professional basic courses, so that professional basic courses shoulder the mission of professional enlightenment, thus implementing moral education, aesthetic education, and psychological education unconsciously. Finally, we must pay attention to the teaching art, use modern teaching methods in practice, and organically integrate experimental demonstrations, operating videos, and physical displays into courseware and blackboard presentations, so that students can experience intuitive feelings in theoretical learning, develop perceptual knowledge through rational knowledge and enhance efficiency in understanding and memory.

Classroom organization should be based on the actual and development needs of students, making students interested in learning under teachers' guidance, so that teaching will be more effective, and students' evaluation will be better, which can also improve teachers' performance.

### 3.2.3 Increase the proportion of process assessment in student performance

Courses in higher vocational colleges are generally offered in unit of semesters. After each semester of course learning, students need pass the final assessment to obtain course results. Students who successfully pass the final assessment do not need to study the same course again in subsequent semesters. The traditional professional basic course mainly adopts final written test paper scores for assessment, and usual performance and experimental operation scores occupy a relatively small proportion, so students often prepare for examination by mechanical memory before the test. As for the impact of such assessment mode, on the one hand, after the short-term memory of recitation, forgetting will follow, and it is common that "students return the knowledge to the teacher after the examination"; on the other hand, from a long-term perspective, the amount of knowledge gained by "mechanical memory + natural forgetting" will not bring sufficient benefits to future applications.

In a more ideal state, students use methodological knowledge in the learning process of a certain course to improve their cognition towards the areas covered by their majors, and gain factual knowledge and



value knowledge at the same time. After study of multiple courses, their cognition accumulates to a certain level and then comprehensive use is possible. Such accumulation of cognition is a process of "enlightenment", which is difficult to achieve through "learning by remembering", but "learning by doing" is required [13].

Therefore, to change the status quo, we should increase the proportion of process assessment in student performance, and make students focus on learning at ordinary times [14]. On the one hand, we need enhance students' chances of "doing" through demonstrations and operations, and record the results of "learning by doing" as usual performance. On the other hand, since professional basic courses are generally the basis for the learning of multiple professional core courses, if we let students learn the content of future professional core courses linked to the current professional basic courses in advance through homework, it can not only increase students' interest and enthusiasm in learning professional basic courses, but also enable students to develop a more comprehensive understanding towards their majors, enhancing students' recognition of their majors.

### 3.3 Actively Participate in Research and Raise the Theoretical Level of the Project

Generally speaking, it is difficult for teachers of professional basic courses to directly undertake horizontal project research. In particular, teachers of professional basic courses whose majors are fewer linked with the majors they teach will gradually deviate from the development frontiers of their majors in their work. They are more and more contact with various courses, teachers, frontline experts, researchers, etc who belong to the majors they teach. In their major will broaden their horizons and bring many cross-field inspirations. Therefore, professional basic course teachers can participate in school-enterprise cooperation projects as team members, give full play to their own solid theoretical foundation advantages. They can not only undertake some work related to their professional background or field of expertise, but also give full play to their theoretical expertise. On the whole, by clearly sorting out theoretical basis and theoretical innovation of the project, they can enhance the theoretical contribution level of the project results, and increase the possibility of project promotion. Participation in research can not only enable teachers of professional basic courses to gain direct results, but also deepen their understanding towards the status of the courses they teach in the majors they teach. Moreover, what they see, do, think, harvest in the process of participation can be integrated into the teaching process to provide more learning materials to students.

### 3.4 Based on the Needs of Students, Develop Fields with Potential Achievement

There is a lack of opportunities to directly participate in and guide students in skill competitions, which is an unsolvable dilemma for most higher vocational teachers of professional basic courses. However, in the practice of vocational education, there are many areas where professional basic course teachers can make a difference. For example, "Curriculum Ideology", which has been in full swing in recent years, is very suitable for implementation in professional basic courses. The start time of professional basic courses is generally the first semester of freshmen. Students at this time not only generally face adaptation

problems, but also lack understanding towards the major they are learning, failing to establish a sense of professional identity. Professional basic course teachers can sort out the contents beneficial to students' mental health, interpersonal communication, learning habits, career planning, etc., and integrate the teacher's own knowledge towards the major, past students' counterpart employment cases into daily teaching, which not only helps develop students' interest in the course itself and the major they learn, and but also helps students pass the critical adaptation stage for freshman. For another example, to cultivate all-round development talents needed by modern enterprises, vocational education must train "well-educated" students. This includes not only the humanistic qualities in the usual sense, but also the cultural understanding towards their majors and occupations. Such knowledge should be distributed among the different courses of all teachers that students can reach in the school. This requires professional basic course teachers to enhance their understanding towards the major they teach, expand the scope of reading, explore professional cultural teaching materials in history and contemporary society, organically integrate them into the classroom teaching content, and shape students' professional cultural literacy in a subtle way. In addition, professional basic course teachers can extensively study psychology, pedagogy, management, current affairs and politics, and find more methods and paths for self-improvement and course improvement. In short, the teaching activities of professional basic courses can make a difference in students' physical and mental development, knowledge development, intellectual development, and habit formation, etc.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The teaching of professional basic courses in higher vocational colleges should be student-centered, the selection of teaching content should be based on students' long-term needs, and classroom design should give consideration to suitability in knowledge and skills instruction. Higher vocational teachers of professional basic courses will encounter different career dilemmas in the process of career development. They need to find targeted coping strategies to achieve self-improvement. The key is that teachers should seize opportunities, broaden their thinking, take the initiative, and dependably respect work. Only in this way can they become an indispensable member of the "double quality" teachers.

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