

The Combination of Characteristic Schooling with Regional Economy

Recruitment Measures of Private Vocational Colleges

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Abstract—Based on the increasingly severe recruitment situation of private vocational colleges in recent years, this article puts forward the suggestion to combine characteristic schooling starting from two aspects of regional economy and specialty features. This article sets its point from three aspects, strengthening the teaching staff construction, textbook construction, and training mode, aiming to improve the quality of private vocational colleges, establish its brand, and attract students.

Keywords—private vocational colleges, features, regional economy

I. THE SEVERE RECRUITMENT SITUATION OF PRIVATE VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

Since 2008, the number of students nationwide has been constantly dropping. The competitive force of private vocational colleges ranks last on the market to attract students, which inflicts severe impact on private vocational colleges. Private vocational colleges have undergone a cold winter of recruitment. Various related news has spread, for example, under-recruitment even at lowest entrance score, private vocational colleges facing cold winter of recruitment, zero archive delivery of 96 vocational colleges. In order to tackle the problem, the enrollment plan of undergraduate has been increasing ever since, which poses greater risks for private vocational colleges. Serious recruitment situation deepens competition within private vocational colleges. Though some of the private vocational colleges have fulfilled national enrollment plan, the actual registering rate is far from satisfactory. Take the city of Shanghai as an example, in the recent three years from 2010 to 2012, the total enrollment plan of 19 private vocational colleges in Shanghai (among which five are private regular universities, 14 are private vocational colleges) reaches 33258, 33138, 33100 in each individual year. However, the number of actual enrolled students is only 28104, 26889, and 25574 in each year, which means the fulfillment ratio is only 84.50%, 81.14%, and 77.26%. Among these figures, the fulfillment ratio of five private regular universities is rather high. From 2010 to 2012, its fulfillment ratio reaches 99.10%, 98.87%, and 104.37% in three consecutive years, much higher than the average figure of all private higher learning institutions. It's even higher than the average level of municipal public colleges. However, in the same corresponding period, the enrollment fulfillment ratio of 14 private vocational colleges

is only 77.83%, 72.83%, and 63.14%, lower than the average fulfillment ratio of five private universities by 21.27%, 26.04%, and 41.23%. From the above, it can be seen that the recruitment situation of private vocational colleges is worsening year by year.

People have always supported the view that students are the premise for the establishment of private colleges, which means that the vitality of private colleges relies on constant student support. Therefore, all private vocational colleges must start from all aspects to solve this problem

II. HIGHLIGHTING FEATURES TO STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION OF REGIONAL ECONOMY

A. Establish Schooling Features Based on Local Economy

As is published on Liberation Daily (2013/04/24), Shanghai Education Commission implements early warning against 15 undergraduate majors due to repetition, low first choice acceptance rate in consecutive years, high acceptance rate of major transferring and parallel choice, and low employment rate of graduates. This news is an alarm to private vocational colleges at the inferior position of recruitment. In order to survive, private vocational colleges must embrace transformation.

Mr Zhou Ji, previous minister of Education Department, pointed out that every school should find the accurate binding point with local economy construction and industry demand to reform school-running model and to highlight its schooling features. Higher vocational education can only be vigorous with its own features. This sentence points out the landing point of private vocational colleges. The investors of non-government funded education are normally enterprises or individuals with considerable economic strength. They're quite familiar with the development direction of local economy and industry demand. School management can take advantage of this convenience to combine college running principle with local economy, reduce or even shut down those majors of high repetition rate, create majors specifically targeted at the regional talent demand, so as to establish schooling features to increase enrollment.

For instance, on the contrary, the higher vocational education of the city of Ningbo represents the new force in recent years with great increase in the number of students and majors. The basis for its development lies in the rapid growth of regional economy. Ningbo is accelerating to

adjust its industrial structure, developing tertiary industries of modern logistics and trade and commerce. Also, the development of high-tech industries such as electronic information, new materials, marine resources and modern medicine brings broad space for the development of private vocational education. Under government guidance, vocational colleges have strengthened research on the market demand carefully, analyzing the short-term, medium, and long-term demand for senior practical talents based on local economy and social development. Also, the development history, current situation, and long-term development trend of similar vocational colleges and similar majors have been analyzed. Integrated with its actual conditions, these colleges constantly adjust their educational ideas, achieving the strategic aim to have specialty when others don't have, have superiority when others have specialty, and to have dominance when others have superiority. For example, private vocational college enrollment related with three majors of clothing, electronic information, and household appliance ranks top ten in recent years.

The notion of basing education upon location has always been a prominent feature of private vocational education. Take Shanghai, which is also the city where the author lives, as an example, private vocational colleges in Shanghai are facing two development opportunities in recent years. One is that since 2006, the “four-center” notion of building Shanghai into the international economy center, international financial center, international shipping center and international trade center was put forward. In Jun 2009, the State Council proposed a more detailed version entitled the State Council’s opinion on increasing Shanghai’s development of modern service industry, advanced manufacturing industry, aiming to become an international financial center and international shipping center. Modern service industries of finance and shipping, and advanced manufacturing industries featuring high-end manufacturing, and research and development are given priority. According to statistical research, in order to become a qualified international financial center, more than 1 million human force is needed in the financial sector. The employee in the shipping industry is only 3.9%, which is a lot lower than the figure of 60% of London. And even compared with Hongkong and Singapore, the above figure is quite low. In 2007, the talents for international shipping insurance in Shanghai is only around 100, which displays urgent need of talents, taken into consideration the fact that related personnel in London is over 3,000. The talent gap brought by regional economy development demonstrates urgent need of a great number of talents in financial industry of securities, banking, fund, and shipping industry of deep-water port construction, channel design and construction, mechanical loading and unloading, pilotage, shipping management and shipping information research, etc. On the other hand, the Disney Park, which is under construction in Shanghai, is another great growth point, making local tourism talents to adapt themselves to the operation of foreign theme park. Concerning the above-mentioned subjects, the local schools in Shanghai have made a positive

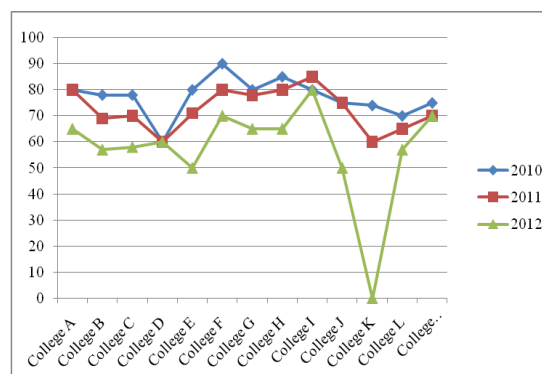
response. Shanghai Jiaotong University has established an advanced finance institute to cultivate high-level financial talents. With the authorization of Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, Shanghai Donghui vocational-technical school established the first major specifically designed for Shanghai Disneyland—service and management of scenic spots. Facing major events of talent acquisition, private vocational colleges should make use of their flexible mechanisms, centering on cultivating application-oriented talents through the establishment of major related with finance and shipping. Based on market talent demand, professional skills need to be refined, and professional teachers be hired to train qualified graduates.

To a great extent, the reason why students choose vocational colleges is to find a direct job after graduation. The development of regional economy on one hand needs a large number of application-oriented talents, on another provides the possibility of cooperation between colleges and enterprises. The best advantage of private vocational colleges lies in its flexible mechanism. It can make full use of the competition and market mechanism to establish new teaching model and operation pattern. They attract talents through help of market mechanism to establish a superior staff team to boost the teaching activities. Also, it introduces enterprise management pattern to enable everybody to play an active role, and to display their strong suits.

B. The Future of Private Vocational Colleges Lie in Characteristic Schooling

Although the recruitment situation of private vocational colleges is quite severe, we can still find a significant phenomenon that’s worthy of our attention from the above figures. The fact is that private vocational colleges with characteristic schooling, fair management and higher reputation witnesses greater recruitment situation than the other counterparts. As is indicated by the graph below, vocational technical college of F and I, which have completed enrollment with high percentage, are all representatives of vocational colleges with characteristic and reputation. F is famous for majors of nursing and international business, while I’s reputation is based on cultivating students with solid English communication abilities and computer skills, plus other strong suits. Therefore, they receive positive welcome from the society.

TABLE I. 13 PRIVATE VOCATIONAL COLLEGES ENROLLMENT RATE RECENT THREE YEARS



How to attract more students and at the same time ensure student registering percentage? All the above examples demonstrate that although private vocational colleges stay at the downstream in enrollment market, they can achieve better status in fierce competition as long as they establish their own brands with distinct characteristic. Also, though various external factors exist in private vocational college recruitment, internal factors are the ones that determine the fundamental cause of development. These internal factors include all aspects of teaching, such as the staff teaching skills, textbook construction, and training mode.

Firstly, reinforce faculty construction.

As leaders of teaching activities, faculty knowledge base directly affects knowledge impartation. Especially to private vocational students, whose theory foundation is not quite solid and study interest not so strong, teachers with broader vision will exert a more powerful influence on students. However in reality, the faculty structure in private vocational colleges is somehow biased. Teachers in private vocational colleges are mainly retired teachers from public schools and young teachers lack teaching experience. The age structure can be compared as big at both ends, and small in the middle, failing to form the trapezoid frame. The aged teachers can't integrate with teaching frontier due to age problem. The young teachers lack knowledge structure, as well as working background concerning enterprises and industry. In order to achieve the faculty rationalization, it should be born in mind to cultivate academic leaders, young and middle-aged core teachers as the dominant force. Also, concerning the titles and academic backgrounds of teachers, attention should be paid to introducing "bipolar" teachers with excellent expertise, great master of both textbooks and students, striving to raise their quality. At the same time, the channels of private vocational colleges should be broadened, accounting intellectuals who aren't at the moment working in private vocational colleges but have the potential abilities to become professional teachers, such as research staff, lawyers, managers, and engineers, etc. Faculty member can also be found in high level intellectuals from all works of life, expanding faculty circle, improving college atmosphere, as well as enhancing the connection between college and practice. For example, asking lawyers to teach law, corporate managers to teach management, economist professors to teach finance, etc. In this way, students learn from them the roles of knowledge in application.

Secondly, create textbooks with characteristic of private vocational education

Textbooks are the basic carrier of knowledge, and also the basic means to conduct teaching. The quality of textbooks is directly related to the quality of talent cultivation. With the rapid development of vocational education, the construction of teaching materials must be in accordance with private vocational education to meet the demands of high level skilled personnel, displaying the features and advantages of vocational education. However, the fact is that currently, the features of vocational education aren't that prominent. Most of the teaching materials borrow similar undergraduate textbooks, or use self-edited handouts.

Though some of them use teaching materials for vocational colleges, its applicability isn't that dominant because they're mostly centered on old-fashioned theories without clear systems.

Textbooks for private vocational colleges should center on bold innovation, demonstrating its characteristics. According to the goals of different majors set by private vocational colleges, industry associations and training units are needed to compile the textbooks. Before compiling the book, broad social investigation should be carried out, centering on the development tendency of technology and equipment in this field, making clear the position and role of these textbooks in the cultivation of talents. Attention should be paid to content selection, teaching method, learning method, combination of experiment and practice, aiming to highlight the characteristics to cultivate capabilities of technology application. All these efforts aim to display the textbooks' age feature. When compiling contents, the long and deep theory analysis should be removed with adequate theory and distinct, alive case study. These cases are close to working conditions and consistent with the reality. Also in textbooks, contents that encourage student invocation should be included, emphasizing the unity of knowledge, capability, and competence structure.

Thirdly, strengthening order-oriented cultivating model between colleges and enterprises

Collaboration between colleges and enterprises should be enhanced with the combination of regional economy and majors in private vocational colleges. The order model should be adopted, providing job opportunities for students from characteristic majors. At the same time, private vocational colleges targets at cultivating practical talents. Therefore, its teaching function determines that it should follow the road of collaboration between colleges and enterprises, featuring job-orientation and combination of production, teaching and research.

To conduct the order-oriented model between colleges and enterprises is an effective means to improve students' practical ability and technical skills, and more significantly an efficient path for zero-distance cooperation. Based on previous investigation on the college part, the order-oriented model chooses enterprises with integrity and prospects. Training agreements are reached between colleges and enterprises, using mutual resource to cultivate students' knowledge and skills according to the corporate demands. Education on enterprise spirit and service concept is also included to improve quality and better the talent training model of future employees.

Private vocational colleges have flexible mechanism. When implementing this training model, active cooperation between colleges and enterprises should be devoted to create technical courses, and design public courses, professional basic courses, specialized courses, elective courses, and system of comprehensive training course according to knowledge and skills demand for different occupations. Students' basic operation skills can be cultivated through college experiment training together corporate practice training. Then, students participate in internships in these signed companies and even participate

in rotations. Thus when they graduate, they fulfill the goal of skill cultivation and zero adjustment period. Of course, this seamless training mode requires faculty members to adopt multiple teaching methods in conducting teaching activities. For instance, conduct teaching activities in enterprises, enabling students to learn theory at the same time to conduct operation practice under real corporate conditions. Other forms include combination of teaching and practicing, integrity between theory and practice, etc. Teachers can adopt methods of teaching through case study, project and question teaching, and skill simulation training, etc. Thus, students can be familiar with the manufacturing technique of enterprises, and even master the production technology.

Employment is another lifeline. Students and parents are satisfied as long as there's excellent employment and good social recognition. Thus employment and recognition are two important factors affecting candidates' choice.

III. CREATE FAVORABLE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT UNDER GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

Seen from the four-center construction of Shanghai and its related talent cultivation policy, it's obvious that government is playing a significant role. The development of private vocational colleges mainly centers on internal construction, however the correct guidance of government makes its positioning more clear and accurate.

Firstly, government departments should pay attention to the development of private vocational colleges, involving privately-supported education into the plan of regional economy and social development. The development of higher education should embody the balance of both public education and privately-run higher education. Secondly, government information should be more transparent, providing reference and basis for the correct positioning of private vocational colleges. Some of the big decisions

should take into consideration the opinion of privately-run education supporters. Thirdly, government should strengthen the guidance towards private vocational colleges, combining local policy and higher education development plan. Major setting, frame and structure, cultivation goal of private vocational colleges should be guided by the government in order to avoid repeated construction. Last but not least, government should establish the privately-run higher education evaluation system and benign competition mechanism featuring survival of the fittest. The government should liberate their mind, update its notions, establish multiple value concept to evaluate the quality of privately-run higher education, and this should start from different levels and colleges with different assessment requirements instead of pure academic perspective.

As the old saying goes, one needs to forge his own hardware. No matter how the external environment changes, private vocational colleges should position itself among limited student resource and severe reality, reinforcing characteristic professions, centering on internal construction, and establishing its own brand. Private vocational colleges are able to attract steady flow of students and cultivate more excellent practical talents in this way..

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