

Collaborative Dynamics between the Higher Vocational College and Enterprises: An Exploration of Shanghai Art & Design Academy

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Abstract. Exemplary collaboration between academic institutions and enterprises underpins the progression of both industry-focused education and the amalgamation of science and education. In the wake of the pandemic, the quest to elevate the standards of such academic-industrial alliances, and to further bolster quality employment and economic growth via vocational education, stands as a universal challenge confronting nations globally. This paper adopts a case study method to dissect the college-enterprise cooperation practices of Shanghai Art & Design Academy (SADA), analyze the problems existing in the school-enterprise cooperation of vocational colleges, and propose countermeasures and suggestions. The SADA has collaborated with the WPP Group, the world's largest marketing and communication service group, to fully align with enterprise employment standards and workflow. The SADA's educational philosophy, reform ideas, training models, practical methods, and management mechanisms have a leading role in the cultivation of high-end applied talents in higher vocational colleges. This paper delves into the collaborative dynamics between higher vocational colleges and enterprises, using Shanghai Art & Design Academy as a case study. This paper presents constructive suggestions regarding the enhancement of the aggregation of high-quality vocational education resources.

Keywords: Vocational Education, College-enterprise Cooperation, Case Study.

1. Introduction

Vocational education is closely linked to economic and social development and is of great significance in promoting employment and entrepreneurship. Since 2012, China's vocational education has achieved a new historical leap, transitioning from relying solely on general education to a relatively independent type of education. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasizes the need to coordinate the collaborative innovation of vocational education, higher education, and continuing education, and to promote the integration of vocational education, industry education, and science education [1]. This represents the next development direction of vocational education in China.

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China also points out that the pro-employment policies should be implemented and emphasizes that employment is pivotal to the people's wellbeing. The emergence of COVID-19 makes the government face more serious challenges of the employment problem. More than 70% of students in vocational schools in China come from rural areas [2]. Empowering these groups with vocational education is essential, providing them with the tools to harness technology and thrive in life. However, in reality, there are still a considerable number of rural and urban youth who have not yet entered regular high school and choose to give up their studies, which reflects the lack of attractiveness of vocational education to some extent.

From an international perspective, many countries are guided by labor market demand and promote the development of vocational education through economic investments and policy supports. For example, in 2022, a global education international organization represented by the UNESCO actively explored the transformation of vocational education to help young people develop job opportunities and acquire the skills of work and entrepreneurship [3]. What's more, due to the impact of the epidemic, the economic growth rate of countries around the world has slowed down, and the

employment environment has become increasingly complex. In order to promote population employment and economic development, the governments of many countries have joined hands with enterprises to vigorously develop vocational education. For example, Germany attaches great importance to the close integration of vocational education with the job market, which is also an important reason for Germany's relatively low unemployment rate. Germany implements the Dual Apprenticeship System, which achieves three integrations within the framework of school-enterprise cooperation, namely the integration of modern vocational education with traditional apprentices, the integration of academic and operational skills, and the integration of professional settings with market demand [4, 5].

From a domestic perspective, guided by the market and employment, the goal of vocational education is to cultivate application-oriented talents with specialized skills of life, services, technology, and management. The core issue is to determine whether the trained talents can adapt to the needs of the market and employment. The school-enterprise cooperation is the basic way to solve the current labor market problems for graduates of higher vocational schools [6]. The newly revised Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China in 2022 clearly stipulates that vocational education should adhere to the integration between industry and education, and the cooperation between enterprises and colleges [7]. Vocational schools and vocational training institutions should pay attention to the integration between industry and education and implement school-enterprise cooperation.

However, the problem with school-enterprise cooperation in higher vocational colleges is that the level of cooperation is still low and uneven now, making it difficult to achieve the level of integration between industry and education and to form a talent training highland with international competitiveness. In the field of arts and crafts professions, hierarchically based on the investment of enterprises, the school-enterprise cooperation is divided into three levels [8]. The first level is projects commissioning design, which operates according to the enterprise project management system. The college organizes the design team, and the enterprise is responsible for project progress and quality control. The second level is the co-construction of curriculums, where both parties develop teaching plans and allocate relevant teaching resources. The curriculum co-construction and teacher sharing effectively match the goals of teaching and enterprise product development. The third level is that enterprises and colleges are the dual subjects of joint teaching. Both parties will give full play to their own advantages, achieve a strong alliance, cultivate high-end professionals, and jointly complete the construction of on-campus training bases and off-campus practical teaching bases. How to achieve the third level of cooperation is a difficult problem for many vocational colleges.

The primary objective of vocational education is to nurture individuals who possess practical skills in areas like production, service, technology, and administration. Central to this is ensuring that these skilled individuals align with market demands and job opportunities. By utilizing a comprehensive dataset from 2012, Guo Jianru and Deng Feng employed the hierarchical linear model to evaluate how reforms in teaching methodologies impacted the job prospects of higher vocational college graduates [9]. Their findings indicated that collaborations between educational institutions and businesses considerably enhanced the likelihood of graduates securing employment.

Strengthening school-enterprise cooperation is currently a major theme in the development of higher vocational education. The study of Pan Haisheng etc. showed that school-enterprise cooperation in Chinese higher vocational education was currently characterized by disparities in the interests of different entities, low quality of cooperation, and inadequate extent of cooperation in 2016 [10]. However, on the level of willingness, both schools and enterprises identified strongly with vocational education school-enterprise cooperation and were filled with hope for the future of school-enterprise cooperation.

Shanghai Art & Design Academy (SADA) is the only independent vocational college of art and design in Shanghai, and the only vocational college in Shanghai that was selected as National Pilot College for Educational Reform and the "Double High" National Program. The SADA is the only college of art and design among 100 national model vocational colleges. It has been exploring new

ways of cooperation with top international enterprises and establishing various forms of school-enterprise cooperation in education. Then, how have the collaborative efforts between the SADA and industry partners influenced the curriculum and pedagogical approaches of the institution? In what ways do industry collaborations enhance the employability and skills of graduates from the SADA? In order to make the school-enterprise cooperation work well, this study intends to make research on integrate theory and practice exploration of the SADA and propose suggestions for further optimizing the school-enterprise cooperation model by case study.

2. Case description

To a certain extent, by partnering with top-tier global enterprises in educational endeavors, the SADA has addressed the challenge of limited collaboration between colleges and businesses. As early as 2008, the reform of the school-running system and mechanism was launched from the top-level design. Through cooperation with domestic and foreign first-class enterprises, the SADA introduced high-end standards from top-tier enterprises to cultivate professional and technical talents.

In 2009, it partnered with the largest independent industrial design consulting company in the Chinese-speaking region, NOVA Design Ltd., to establish a school-enterprise cooperation. The company assigned designers to the teaching team, breaking through the traditional curriculum design process and building a spiraling project training system. In a short period, the teaching style had undergone a completely new change, and students had made rapid progress. At the same time, the SADA and the domestic digital production benchmark company, Crystal Digital Technology Co., Ltd., took the opportunity of collaborating in the production of the TV feature film Shanghai, and held the Crystal short-term training program in 2010. 38 students were enrolled and selected to participate in the digital designer training course led by the Crystal [11]. After 18 weeks of intensive teaching and practical training, all students had taken up their corresponding jobs and received high praise. Subsequently, the SADA and the Crystal cooperated to establish a secondary school, the Crystal Digital Art School, where major professional teachers were from the Crystal. On this basis, in 2011, the SADA negotiated cooperation with the world's largest marketing and communication service group, Wire & Plastic Products Group (WPP Group), to further carry out comprehensive reform and innovative practice with enterprises [12]. The SADA was seeking to break through the problem of integrating graduates with the market, while the WPP Group was anxious to expand its business, but no one is available. The two sides hit it off as soon as possible, and another innovative secondary school the WPP School had emerged.

2.1. Innovation in the mechanism of school-enterprise cooperation model

The SADA enhances the level of school-enterprise cooperation by introducing standards and experiences for cultivating high-end skilled talents at home and abroad, and jointly leading the entire process of talent cultivation. In the Crystal Digital Art School and the WPP School, the SADA and its partners are jointly responsible for the top-level design, organizational structure, educational philosophy, educational standards, talent cultivation plans, and curriculum content of the school. To ensure that the training objectives, talent specifications, and curriculum frameworks of cooperative education meet the international high-end employment standards of the industry, they jointly implement teaching management, faculty team building, practical training and evaluation, and internship employment guidance.

The SADA establishes a council system for joint decision-making between schools and enterprises, and a joint meeting system between schools and enterprises. It hires world-class industry experts to form an academic committee to oversee the construction of the teaching system and the allocation of teaching resources. It also explores the implementation of dual subject education and uses institutional guarantees for this innovative reform. For example, the WPP School establishes a three-level organizational structure. The first level is to establish a WPP School council of the college-enterprise cooperation at the college level (the group leadership level), implementing a dean

responsibility system under the leadership of the council. The second level is to establish an expert committee and an academic committee of the college-enterprise cooperation at the department level (group management level). The third level is to establish teaching groups at the level of professional and basic departments within the schools, which are responsible for the course content, teaching focus, and teaching method of relevant majors.

The training objectives are not satisfied with only delivering general skilled talents to the industry, and it is recognized that vocational education should also meet high-end vocational standards. Through the reform of the college-enterprise cooperation, it has been fully proven that higher vocational colleges can face the future and cultivate young creative leader talents with good characters and abilities. For example, among the 2022 graduates of the SADA, 72.38% choose to work in Shanghai to serve local economic development, while the employment proportion in other provinces and cities in China is 27.62% [13]. According to the college statistics, the graduation destination implementation rate of 2022 graduates is over 90% for all schools and departments. Among them, the WPP School has the highest graduation destination implementation rate, which is 98.05%.

2.2. Innovation in the training mode of high-end applied talents

The SADA creates educational standards that conform to the laws of education and teaching for high-end skilled talents. It proposes the idea of "not pursuing the high academic qualification degree but pursuing the high vocational education standard" and the concept of "one day of education is equivalent to one day as practitioner". Due to keep the teaching requirements, progress, and intensity synchronized with the industry, it cultivates students to always be prepared to seamlessly integrate with industry work.

The SADA creates a professional teaching team led by international industry elites. All the professional teachers at the Crystal Digital Art School come from the front line of the company. The five teaching directors of WPP College, including strategic planning, creative design, digital creativity, and business English, are senior creative directors in the industry. They teach full-time on campus and lead the teaching team.

The SADA creates a course system based on top tier enterprise real work projects. The course system is linked by project-based teaching with real enterprise cases or participation in creative competitions as project units, and students' work groups collaborate to complete the entire project. Professional theory and skill training are combined with project teaching, and the progress of each course is integrated into the project schedule. At the same time, paid internship project development is implemented, in which top enterprises lead the participation in international top creative design competitions.

The SADA creates and promotes the A.F.S.G.C teaching method. Through five stages: Aptitude Screening, Solid Foundation, Real World Simulation, Group Learning, and Elite Coaching, students are taught according to their aptitude to identify suitable job positions. It has also compiled suitable textbooks to fill the gap in the field of high-end vocational talent cultivation.

3. Analysis on the problems

Currently, just like the SADA before the reform of the college-enterprise cooperation, many higher vocational colleges in China are facing the following development issues.

Firstly, the cultivation of high-end talents is still relatively weak. Higher vocational education in the field of art is generally regarded as a temporary choice when the college entrance examination is unfavorable. It is even more helpless to choose vocational colleges. In the minds of candidates and their parents, this is not a choice for the training system and life planning. Higher vocational colleges still lack the basic conditions and proactive awareness for cultivating high-end talents, especially due to limitations in equipment, facilities, and teaching staff. Therefore, new models and technologies in cutting-edge fields cannot be applied in the classroom in a timely manner. As a result, the employment of students is unstable and the job-hopping rate is high. Through a third-party survey of students six

months after graduation, the SADA found that the job-hopping rate of students is as high as 47% [14]. Higher vocational colleges still lack in high-end talent cultivation, which are unable to accurately match production needs such as technological upgrading and process transformation.

Secondly, excellent teachers are difficult to obtain, and the current teaching concepts and methods are disconnected from market demand to some degree. From the feedback of employers, it can be seen that the current higher vocational education system in art and design is derived from traditional pure art teaching and is disconnected from the professional needs of society. As a result, it is difficult for graduates to directly integrate into the work environment. The important reason is that it is difficult to find excellent dual-type teachers, and most of the existing teachers are so inbred academically that they lack industry experience and their teaching concepts are outdated to some extent.

Thirdly, the existing school-enterprise cooperation is mostly a mere formality without system design, and both parties lack enthusiasm. On one hand, the higher vocational colleges, due to its guaranteed funding, are stuck in their own trap. They don't allow their cooperative enterprises to interfere with the top-level design of teaching. On the other hand, the cooperative enterprises often come to find suitable employees, but they are often disappointed.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Enhancing collaborative innovation

The Chinese authorities ought to motivate research-based universities to leverage their unique resources, prompting them to immerse more in vocational education. This includes pioneering cooperative models with higher vocational institutions for resource-sharing. Moreover, it should also encourage a group of high-level vocational colleges with industry backgrounds to engage in deeper cooperation with ordinary universities and research institutions in the R&D and practical aspects of cutting-edge fields and form a batch of iconic applied research achievements.

4.2. Supporting high-quality enterprises and vocational colleges

The government should stimulate the sense of mission and responsibility of leading enterprises in the industry and encourage them to participate in vocational education. It also should promote the joint efforts of top enterprises in the industry and higher vocational colleges to build a group of international vocational colleges with Chinese characteristics and world-class standards by innovating institutional supply.

4.3. Increasing the aggregation of high-quality vocational education resources

It is imperative for the government to establish an international platform dedicated to merging industry and education. There's a pressing need to enhance the engineering certification system, ensuring it aligns with global standards, which in turn elevates the international stature of our technical and skilled workforce. By fostering project collaborations and facilitating personnel exchanges, the government can afford educators the chance to grasp cutting-edge global technologies and secure valuable resources for practical internships and training.

4.4. Enriching the connotation of the industry-education integration

It is vital for governing bodies to transition from an exclusively institution-centric paradigm to a multifaceted framework, emphasizing the role of enterprises, governmental entities, and industrial hubs. This transition would adeptly harness the synergies of multi-agential educational consortia.

4.5. Promoting the science-education integration comprehensively

The government should deepen the reform of vocational education methods and management systems and support higher vocational colleges to collaborate with high-level universities, research institutes, leading enterprises, industry organizations, etc. to create a vocational education community.

At the same time, the vocational colleges should form high-level scientific and technological achievements and serve the high-quality development of the industry and economy.

5. Conclusion

Only by jointly building a community with a shared future between higher vocational colleges and enterprises, and establishing diverse and flexible cooperation models, can we solve the bottleneck problems in enterprise needs and student talent cultivation. The SADA has collaborated with the WPP Group, the world's largest marketing and communication service group, to fully align with enterprise employment standards and workflow. In order to cultivate high-end professional talents with international competitiveness, the SADA has carried out comprehensive and in-depth educational reforms and innovative practices. The SADA's educational philosophy, reform ideas, training models, practical methods, and management mechanisms have a leading role in the cultivation of high-end applied talents in higher vocational colleges. The SADA's practice has shown that the college-enterprise cooperation has brought fresh cases to teaching, which facilitates the updating of teachers' knowledge structure and also serves as a stage for excellent students to enter the workplace in advance. Exploring college-enterprise cooperation methods and operational models suitable for different colleges is of great significance for improving the quality of professional talents and the development of Chinese vocational education.

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