

Current Situation and Enhancement Strategies for Core Competency Development of Vocational High School Students

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Abstract: *With the increasing demand for versatile talents in society, the development of core competencies in vocational high school students has become increasingly important. This paper aims to analyze the current state of core competencies development among vocational high school students, identify existing issues, and propose corresponding enhancement strategies. Through methods such as literature analysis, questionnaires, and interviews, this study examines the development of academic, vocational, and social competencies in vocational high school students, highlighting the current shortcomings. Based on the research findings, the paper suggests strategies for comprehensively improving students' core competencies through educational policy support, curriculum reform and innovation, professional development of teachers, school-enterprise collaboration, and support from families and society.*

Keywords: *Vocational high school, core competencies, current situation, enhancement strategies, educational reform*

Introduction

Vocational education holds a significant position in the modern education system, with its primary goal being to cultivate highly skilled professionals with comprehensive qualities. The development of core competencies in vocational education is crucial for students' future careers and social lives. However, there are still numerous problems and challenges in the current development of core competencies among vocational high school students. Research on the development of core competencies in vocational high school students helps to enrich vocational education theory and deepen the understanding of the concept and components of core competencies. By revealing the issues in the development of core competencies among vocational high school students and proposing targeted enhancement strategies, this study provides guidance for educational practice and promotes the improvement of vocational education quality.

1. Current Situation of Core Competencies Development in Vocational High School Students

1.1 Definition and Components of Core Competencies

Core competencies refer to the comprehensive embodiment of the essential abilities, knowledge, and attitudes required for lifelong learning and social practice. They encompass not only academic literacy but also vocational and social literacy, serving as crucial indicators for assessing the holistic development of vocational high school students. Specifically, core competencies can be categorized into the following key components:

1.1.1 Academic Literacy

Academic literacy primarily refers to the development of students' foundational knowledge in basic subjects, learning abilities, and academic attitudes. It includes proficiency in language, mathematics, and scientific literacy, as well as the cultivation of information literacy and learning strategies. These literacies form the foundation for further learning and development, enhancing students' logical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation capabilities.

1.1.2 Vocational Literacy

Vocational literacy refers to students' development in professional skills, vocational attitudes, and career planning. It includes competencies such as technical expertise, practical operational skills, work ethics, and vocational attitudes. Vocational literacy provides the fundamental abilities required for students to perform excellently in the workplace and achieve their career goals.^[1]

1.1.3 Social Literacy

Social literacy refers to students' development in social responsibility, communication skills, and teamwork. It includes competencies such as civic awareness, social responsibility, interpersonal communication, and team spirit. Social literacy helps students integrate better into society, build positive interpersonal relationships, and enhance their social adaptability and sense of collective honor.

1.1.4 Emotional Literacy

Emotional literacy refers to students' development in emotional management, self-awareness, and mental health. It includes competencies such as emotional regulation, self-control, self-esteem, and stress resilience. Emotional literacy enables students to maintain mental health, cope with various pressures and challenges in learning and life, and improve their emotional intelligence and sense of well-being.

1.2 Current Situation Analysis

Currently, the development of core competencies among vocational high school students exhibits certain characteristics and trends, but also faces numerous problems and challenges. This paper conducts a detailed analysis of the current state of core competencies development among vocational high school students through questionnaire surveys, interviews, and literature reviews.

1.2.1 Academic Literacy

Vocational high school students generally have a weak grasp of foundational knowledge in basic subjects, particularly in mathematics and science. On the one hand, the curriculum in vocational high schools tends to emphasize vocational skills training, resulting in relatively insufficient time and resources for basic academic subjects. On the other hand, some students enter vocational high schools with a weak academic foundation from junior high school, making it difficult for them to keep up with academic courses. Additionally, vocational high school students often display significant gaps in information literacy and learning strategies, affecting their ability for self-directed and lifelong learning.

1.2.2 Vocational Literacy

Vocational high school students generally have certain advantages in professional skills and practical operational abilities, but there are deficiencies in vocational attitudes and career planning. Although some students possess strong technical skills, they often lack a clear understanding of career development and do not have well-defined career goals and plans. Moreover, there are issues in work ethics and vocational attitudes, with some students displaying a lack of responsibility and dedication in their work, hindering the comprehensive development of their vocational literacy.^[2]

1.2.3 Social Literacy

The development of social responsibility, communication skills, and teamwork among vocational high school students varies. While some students exhibit strong teamwork and interpersonal communication skills and actively participate in community and social activities, others show shortcomings in these areas. Particularly in terms of social responsibility and civic awareness, some students' cognition and behavior have not reached expected levels, indicating a need for further education and guidance.

1.2.4 Emotional Literacy

Vocational high school students face certain challenges in emotional management and mental health. Surveys indicate that some students struggle with emotional regulation and self-control, making them susceptible to the pressures of learning and life. Additionally, due to a lack of effective psychological counseling and support, some students lack positive coping strategies when facing setbacks and difficulties, affecting their mental health and emotional development.

2. Current Issues in the Development of Core Competencies of Vocational High School Students

2.1 Academic Competencies

Vocational high school students face significant deficiencies in terms of academic competencies, particularly in the mastery of basic subject knowledge, the development of learning abilities, and the establishment of academic attitudes.

First, there is a lack of mastery of basic subject knowledge. Due to the vocational high school curriculum being more focused on vocational skills training, the proportion of basic subject courses is relatively small. This results in students having weaker knowledge in core subjects such as mathematics, science, and language. Some students already faced academic difficulties during their middle school years, and as they enter vocational high school, the increased difficulty of basic subject learning further exacerbates poor learning outcomes. This not only affects their overall development but also limits their ability to learn and grow in their future careers.

Second, there is an inadequacy in the cultivation of learning abilities. Vocational high school students exhibit significant shortcomings in terms of autonomous learning and lifelong learning abilities. Many students are accustomed to passively receiving knowledge and lack the ability to independently explore and solve problems. In the information age, information literacy has become a crucial learning skill, yet vocational high school students generally have weak abilities in acquiring, filtering, and applying information, making it difficult for them to effectively use modern information technology for learning and research.

Finally, there is a deficiency in the establishment of academic attitudes. Some vocational high school students lack a positive attitude toward academic learning and do not have clear goals, resulting in a lack of motivation to learn. Some students believe that vocational high schools primarily focus on learning vocational skills, thus neglecting the importance of basic subjects. This leads to a negative learning attitude and poor academic performance. Such attitudes not only affect their academic performance during vocational high school but also have a detrimental impact on their future career development.

2.2 Vocational Competencies

While vocational high school students have certain advantages in terms of vocational competencies, there are also numerous issues, particularly in the practical application of vocational skills, the establishment of vocational attitudes, and the clarity of career planning.

First, there is a lack of practical application of vocational skills. Although vocational high schools emphasize vocational skills training, the skills students learn often do not align with actual job requirements. Some courses and teaching content are not updated in a timely manner and do not keep pace with industry developments and market demands, resulting in outdated skills that do not meet employers' needs. Additionally, there is a lack of practical teaching components, leaving students with insufficient hands-on experience and problem-solving skills, making their vocational skills less practical and competitive.^[3]

Second, there is a deficiency in the establishment of vocational attitudes. Vocational high school students show inadequacies in terms of work ethics and professional attitudes. Some students lack a sense of responsibility and dedication, have unprofessional attitudes, and are easily influenced by external pressures and temptations, making it difficult for them to maintain stable and continuous development in their careers. The lack of work ethics not only affects students' vocational competencies but also has a negative impact on their career development and social image.

Finally, there is a lack of clarity in career planning. Many vocational high school students lack clear goals and pathways in their career planning. Some students do not have a clear understanding of or plans for their future career choices, lacking long-term career development goals and specific action plans. This not only affects their motivation and effectiveness in vocational high school but also has a negative impact on their future career development.

2.3 Social Competencies

The development of social competencies among vocational high school students is noticeably inadequate, particularly in terms of social responsibility, communication skills, and teamwork spirit.

First, there is a lack of social responsibility. Some vocational high school students have a weak understanding of social responsibility, showing little awareness or involvement in public affairs and social issues. This leads to a passive approach to social roles and responsibilities, lacking initiative and enthusiasm. The deficiency in social responsibility not only affects their role positioning and responsibility-taking in society but also limits their development and growth within society.

Second, communication skills are inadequate. Vocational high school students generally show weaknesses in communication and interpersonal skills. Some students lack effective communication techniques and expression abilities, which often lead to misunderstandings and conflicts during interactions with others, making it difficult for them to establish and maintain good interpersonal relationships. The deficiency in communication skills not only affects their cooperation and communication in study and work but also has a negative impact on their social adaptability and mental health.

Finally, there is a lack of teamwork spirit. The development of teamwork spirit among vocational high school students is also significantly lacking. Some students show a lack of cooperation awareness and team spirit during group activities, making it difficult for them to effectively participate in teamwork and collective activities. The deficiency in teamwork spirit not only affects their ability to collaborate in their careers but also negatively impacts their personal development and integration into society.

3. Strategies for Enhancing Core Competencies of Vocational High School Students

3.1 Support from Educational Policies

Support from educational policies is a crucial guarantee for enhancing the core competencies of vocational high school students. The government should formulate and implement a series of policy measures to promote the development of vocational education and improve students' comprehensive qualities and core abilities.

First, strengthen policy guidance. The government should issue specific policy documents targeting the development of core competencies for vocational high school students, clearly defining the goals and specific requirements for cultivating these competencies. For example, a "Development Outline for Core Competencies of Vocational High School Students" could be established, which would set out specific standards and evaluation systems for academic, vocational, and social competencies, ensuring the systematic and scientific cultivation of core competencies.

Second, increase financial investment. The government should allocate special funds to support projects aimed at developing core competencies in vocational high schools. For instance, a vocational education development fund could be established to support infrastructure construction, the purchase of teaching equipment, teacher training, and curriculum development, providing sufficient financial backing to enhance the overall level of vocational education.^[4]

Lastly, optimize the evaluation mechanism. The government should establish and improve the evaluation mechanisms for the development of core competencies among vocational high school students, using diversified evaluation methods to scientifically assess students' comprehensive qualities and core abilities. For example, a combination of formative and summative assessments could be used, evaluating students through learning portfolios, project outcomes, and social practice to fully reflect their core competency development levels.

3.2 Curriculum Reform and Innovation

Curriculum reform and innovation are key steps in enhancing the core competencies of vocational high school students. The curriculum should closely align with the characteristics of vocational education and the needs of students, emphasizing the integration of theory and practice to enhance the practicality and foresight of the courses.

First, optimize the curriculum structure. Vocational high school curricula should maintain a focus on vocational skills training while increasing the proportion of foundational subjects and comprehensive quality courses. For example, basic subjects such as mathematics, science, and language could be integrated into vocational skill courses to improve students' academic competencies; at the same time, courses that foster social responsibility, teamwork, and communication skills could be added to enhance students' social competencies.

Second, innovate teaching methods. Vocational high schools should adopt diverse and innovative teaching methods to stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm for learning. For example, project-based learning, case studies, and scenario-based teaching could be employed to cultivate students' practical abilities and problem-solving skills. Additionally, modern information technology tools, such as online courses and virtual simulations, could be introduced to improve the interactivity and effectiveness of teaching.

Finally, strengthen practical teaching. Practical teaching is an essential component of vocational education, as it enhances students' vocational competencies and social adaptability through hands-on experience and social practice. For instance, schools could collaborate with enterprises to establish off-campus internship bases where students can gain real-world experience and practice in authentic work environments. Furthermore, students could be encouraged to participate in community service and social activities to develop their sense of social responsibility and teamwork skills.

3.3 Professional Development of Teachers

The professional development of teachers is a critical support for enhancing the core competencies of vocational high school students. Teachers are the direct implementers of core competency cultivation, and their professional qualities and teaching abilities directly impact students' learning outcomes and overall development.

First, strengthen teacher training. Governments and schools should regularly organize teacher training programs to improve teachers' professional knowledge and teaching skills. For example, specialized lectures, workshops, and both internal and external exchanges could be provided to offer teachers the latest educational theories and practical experiences, enhancing their teaching level and professional qualities. Continuing education and further academic training could also be promoted to elevate teachers' academic qualifications and research capabilities.^[5]

Second, establish teacher learning communities. Schools should encourage and support collaboration and exchange among teachers by establishing teacher learning communities to promote professional development. For instance, teaching and research groups or instructional teams could be formed to engage teachers in collective lesson planning, teaching research, and experience sharing, thereby enhancing their teamwork spirit and innovative capabilities.

Lastly, enhance teachers' professional ethics. Teachers should possess not only professional knowledge and teaching skills but also a strong sense of professional ethics and integrity. For example, training in professional ethics and character education could be provided to strengthen teachers' sense of responsibility, dedication, and service, setting a positive example for students and guiding their growth.

3.4 School-Enterprise Cooperation

School-enterprise cooperation is a vital pathway for enhancing the core competencies of vocational high school students. By integrating the resources and expertise of enterprises into schools, students can gain more practical experience and career guidance.

First, establish a mechanism for school-enterprise cooperation. Schools should actively establish long-term and stable cooperative relationships with enterprises by signing cooperation agreements that clearly define the rights and obligations of both parties. For instance, schools could collaborate with local enterprises to jointly develop courses and teaching materials, provide internship and employment opportunities, and enhance students' vocational competencies and employability.

Second, set up enterprise internship bases. Schools should collaborate with enterprises to establish off-campus internship bases where students can engage in practical operations and practice. For example, rotational internships and job experiences could be offered to allow students to practice in various positions, understand enterprise production processes, and job requirements, and gain practical operational experience.

Finally, introduce enterprise experts to teach. Schools should invite enterprise experts and technical staff to give lectures and share the latest industry trends and cutting-edge technologies. For example, specialized lectures and technical training sessions could be organized to help students understand industry developments and career prospects, thereby enhancing their vocational competencies and career planning abilities.^[6]

3.5 Family and Social Support

Family and social support are essential safeguards for enhancing the core competencies of vocational high school students. The support and involvement of families and society can provide a conducive environment and resources for the development of students' core competencies.

First, strengthen home-school collaboration. Schools should actively establish good cooperative relationships with families to jointly promote the development of students' core competencies. For example, parent-teacher meetings and home-school interaction platforms could be used to communicate students' learning progress and growth needs, providing targeted educational guidance and support.

Second, create a positive family environment. The family is the first environment for a student's growth, and a positive family environment has a significant impact on the development of their core competencies. For instance, parents should focus on supporting their children's learning and emotional well-being, creating a positive and encouraging family atmosphere that fosters their learning interest and self-confidence.

Lastly, leverage the role of social organizations. Social organizations play an important role in the development of students' core competencies by providing resources and services to support their growth. For example, community organizations could organize diverse social practice activities to enhance students' sense of social responsibility and teamwork. Non-profit organizations could offer career guidance and training to help students develop career plans, thereby improving their vocational competencies and employability.

Conclusion

Through the study of the current state of core competency development among vocational high school students, this paper identifies several deficiencies in areas such as academic literacy, vocational skills, and social competencies. To address these issues, a series of strategies have been proposed. The effective implementation of these strategies requires collaborative efforts from multiple stakeholders to significantly enhance the core competencies of vocational high school students. Future research should further explore the impact of different regions and types of schools on the development of core competencies in vocational high school students, providing more detailed and specific guidance.

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