

Research on Strategies to Address Problems in Internship Management for Vocational Schools

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Abstract: The internship management of vocational college students is an important part of cultivating skilled talents, but there are still many problems in the current internship management practice. This study explores the main problems existing in the internship management of vocational college students, including the lack of pertinence of pre-internship training, the lack of resources of the mentor team, the disconnection between the internship content and career goals, the insufficient support of mentors during the internship process, the poor communication and feedback mechanism, and the imperfect post-internship feedback mechanism. In order to solve these problems, this study proposes a series of improvement strategies. The results of this study provide practical guidance for improving the quality of internship management in vocational colleges, and help students better realize the transition from school to professional role.

1. Introduction

Internships, also known as professional internships or top-post internships, are typically implemented by vocational colleges based on their teaching plans and talent training programs. These programs organize students to engage in work on production lines, experience real professional environments, and participate in actual job tasks. Vocational education refers to educational activities aimed at equipping individuals with the professional ethics, knowledge, technical skills, and abilities required for specific occupations or career development (Peng & Peng, 2023)^[1]. However, numerous common problems persist in the management of student internships at vocational colleges. Analyzing, discussing, and addressing these issues provides theoretical significance for improving internship management and enhancing the quality of vocational talent training.

2. The Concept of Internship

Internship includes professional internship and top-post internship, which refers to the process of mastering specific skills or comprehensive vocational ability after students have completed certain theoretical learning and under the organization and guidance of the school, through engaging in certain work practice at the employer. Generally speaking, vocational education students will be in school for 2 years, and in the third year, they will go to the corresponding professional company for 3-6 months of paid internship.

In January 2022, the Ministry of Education, together with relevant departments, jointly issued the

newly revised Regulations on the Administration of Internships for Vocational School Students, which defines internship as a practical education and teaching activity arranged by vocational school students who implement full-time academic education in accordance with the requirements of professional training objectives and talent training programs, arranged by vocational schools or approved by vocational schools to conduct professional ethics and technical skills training in enterprises and other units, including cognitive internships and on-the-job internships. Among them, on-the-job internship refers to the activities of students who have a certain ability to work in practical positions, and under the guidance of professionals, assist or participate in practical work relatively independently. Chen and Yang (2020) proposed the "2+1" talent training model, and believed that the "2+1" model is essentially an upgraded version of the internship talent training model^[2]. They believe that the "2+1" model is a specific form of close integration of production, education and research, specifically the first two years of vocational college students in the school to learn professional theoretical knowledge, the last year to the internship unit top post internship and graduation program.

To sum up, the "internship" referred to in this article includes not only the professional internship of junior college students, but also the two forms of internship and graduation internship.

3. The practical significance of internship in the process of talent training in vocational colleges

3.1 Internship is an important form of talent training in vocational colleges

As an important part of the vocational education teaching program, the internship closely integrates classroom theory with practical work, enabling students to apply what they have learned in a real work environment. This teaching mode can not only enhance students' understanding of theoretical knowledge, but also help students establish a practical understanding of industry work, which provides important support for the "combination of work and learning" training model of vocational colleges. Vocational colleges should continue to actively innovate and reform the current teaching methods and contents, so as to effectively improve the quality of teaching in vocational colleges, so as to meet the current vocational education and social needs for vocational and technical talents and talent training mechanism (Lin, K., 2020)^[3].

3.2 Internship is the main way to improve students' professional skills and practical skills

The core goal of vocational education is to develop technical talents with practical skills and professional skills, and internships provide students with direct exposure to work processes and job skills. Interns "Expect to apply the theoretical knowledge they have learned over the years to practice and improve their professional skills through internships " (Yang, C., 2020) ^[4]. In the course of the internship, students can exercise service skills, communication skills, teamwork skills, and emergency response skills through specific tasks, which are difficult to fully cover in classroom teaching. At the same time, internships can also help students discover their own shortcomings and improve through feedback from mentors, so as to achieve rapid improvement in skills and lay a solid foundation for future career development.

4. Problems in the management of internships for students in vocational colleges

4.1 Problems before the internship

The content of pre-internship training is monolithic and insufficiently targeted. Most vocational colleges mainly focus on basic theories and general skills in the pre-internship training of students, while there is insufficient specific practical training in actual job requirements, service skills and

emergency response capabilities. This shortcoming leads to students' weak adaptability in practical work, especially when faced with complex tasks.

Insufficient resource allocation for the instructor team. Limited to the shortage of teachers in most vocational colleges, the team of internship tutors is often small, which leads to limited personalized guidance capabilities. There are few opportunities for instructors to communicate with students, and they cannot provide personalized guidance for each student's actual needs. In addition, the limited resources of the internship unit lead to limited job choices for students, which affects the career development experience.

Lack of career planning guidance. Kroon and Franc (2022) believed that employers attach great importance to the outcomes of student internships, and these considerations are not limited to productivity, possible future. Therefore, cultivating skilled talents in line with the needs of economic and social development is the core value of vocational education, which is also the core orientation of the goal of student internship^[5]. Scientific career planning guidance can help students adapt to the internship environment as soon as possible and overcome various psychological obstacles and challenges encountered in the internship process. This lack of support increases the stress on students and makes them less confident when they enter the internship environment.

The depth of school-enterprise cooperation is insufficient. The maximum duration of a student internship is usually 6 months, which often causes an administrative burden on the internship unit. This is especially true for for-profit private enterprises. This also affects the depth of cooperation between the school and the internship unit. The school lacks the selection of internship units and the depth of cooperation, which makes it difficult to ensure that students get high-quality practice opportunities in internships.

4.2 Problems in the internship process

The position arrangement is single, and there is a lack of job rotation opportunities. At present, the management of internship positions basically implements single-post internships. The arrangement of internship positions is too fixed, and there is a lack of rotation mechanism. As a result, students are unable to fully understand the diversity of the industry, which limits the development of comprehensive skills.

Mentorship support is inadequate. During the internship, the insufficient number of tutors will directly lead to the untimely and incomplete guidance of students, especially when encountering problems, it is difficult to solve them in time.

The communication and feedback mechanism is not perfect. Feedback mechanisms are an important part of ensuring the effectiveness of educational programs. Poor communication between the school and the internship unit will affect the efficiency of internship management and make students lack a sense of security and support during the internship. Poor communication and feedback between the internship instructor and the internship unit makes it difficult for students to get timely feedback when they encounter problems during the internship, which directly affects the effect of students' internship.

There is a disconnect between the content of the internship and the career goals. Although the content of student internships generally meets the basic needs of the industry, there is still a certain gap between the course objectives of students' on-campus learning and the actual needs of the industry. On the whole, students rated the matching of internship tasks with career goals low. The inability to gain experience related to their career planning in the internship position weakens the students' sense of professional identity and development potential during the internship process.

4.3 Problems in the internship summary and feedback stage

The summary and feedback mechanism is not perfect. After the internship is completed, the school and the internship unit lack a systematic summary and feedback mechanism, resulting in the students' accumulated experience and shortcomings in the internship not being fully evaluated, and the school also failing to provide students with comprehensive career development suggestions, resulting in a lack of clear understanding of students' own ability improvement.

Insufficient integration of internship experience and insufficient career development guidance. At present, most vocational schools often regard the end of internship management as the end point of internship management, and lack in-depth post-internship management. This leads to a lack of in-depth reflection and integration of internship experiences on students, and the ability to fully translate practical experience into theoretical knowledge and future work. This not only affects students' ability to turn internship experience into career development advantages, but also directly reduces the long-term effect of internship programs on students' career ability.

5. Resolution strategy

According to the current problems in the management of internships in vocational colleges, optimization and improvement can be carried out from the following aspects:

5.1 Improve the design of internship programs and strengthen resource support

During the internship design stage, we need to ensure that the content of the internship course is closely aligned with industry demands. And we need to strive to align students' learning goals with their internship objectives. Through in-depth cooperation with industry experts and industry partners, we will continuously strengthen the docking and updating with industry needs, and strive to reflect the latest trends in the industry. This can also promote internship content to continuously meet the needs of students' career development.

In terms of resource support, we will increase the size of the mentor team and provide training support from professional mentors and industry experts. Students and supervisors receive formal training on internship work and interpersonal relationships before the start of the internship, it will be of great help to them in their future internship (Zehr, 2020)^[6]. During the internship process, each student is assigned a mentor to ensure timely and effective feedback. Specifically, each internship unit will allocate an appropriate number of school mentors according to the student ratio. This can enhance the effectiveness of internship guidance training. On the other hand, the internship unit provides students with rich practical training in service skills, communication skills, emergency response, etc. Industry experts can also be invited regularly to provide targeted workplace training for students

5.2 Optimize and strengthen the construction of internship management and communication and feedback mechanisms

In terms of internship evaluation feedback mechanism, we need to further optimize the internship management process to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of internship feedback. Specifically, we will strengthen cooperation with high-quality internship units to ensure that students have access to a diverse range of roles and departments. In the selection of internship positions, the implementation of the rotation mechanism, optimize the job rotation opportunities, so that students understand all aspects of the industry. At the level of internship guidance, the school and internship unit provide psychological counseling and stress management training to help students relieve

psychological pressure during the internship process. In terms of feedback efficiency, schools should improve level of informatization to establish an efficient feedback mechanism.

5.3 Improve the mechanism for summarizing internship experience and transforming results

Hora (2020) believed that the most salient terms in the cultural domain of internships were: Experience, Learning, Paid, and Connections^[7]. Therefore, in terms of internship feedback and achievement transformation, the summary and feedback system should be improved to provide comprehensive evaluation and career advice for each student. For example, after the internship, the school organizes an internship summary meeting to discuss the experience and shortcomings of the internship with the students. The school should also strengthen the guidance of students' career development, and provide detailed career planning suggestions according to students' career interests and strengths, so as to help students clarify their future development direction.

6. Conclusion

During the internship, interns will face a variety of difficulties and challenges. Vo et al. (2022) advocated that the main challenges for interns are communication and conduct, working hours, problem-solving skills, self-confidence, supervision, and working environment But physical requirements^[8]. Ensuring that students successfully complete the internship task is the main goal of internship management. In view of the problems in internship management, this study proposes improvement strategies including strengthening personalized training before internship, optimizing mentor team building, improving feedback and communication mechanisms, and improving career development planning support. These strategies not only help to improve the systematization and effectiveness of internship management in vocational colleges, but also enhance students' vocational ability and employment competitiveness, and provide a feasible reference path for improving the quality of talent training in vocational education.

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