

Exploration of a Blended Education Model Based on Employment Skills Cultivation: A Case Study of H University's Public Administration Major

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ABSTRACT

As an interdisciplinary field, public administration education often faces issues such as unclear training objectives and lack of distinct disciplinary characteristics, leading to a less optimistic employment situation for graduates in the job market and the dilemma of "unemployment right after graduation." Within the context of the "Internet+" and big data era, in response to this challenge, this paper aims to explore how a blended education model, combining online and offline approaches, can enhance the employment skills of students majoring in public administration. The promotion and implementation of the blended education model hold significant implications for both online and offline educational practices.

Keywords: Blended education, Skill cultivation, Employment skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

In November 2022, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security successfully held the 2023 National Networking Video Conference on Employment and Entrepreneurship for General Higher Education Graduates. The conference pointed out that the scale of the 2023 university graduates is expected to reach 11.58 million, an increase of 820,000 compared to the previous year, setting a new record in the number of graduates. Meanwhile, according to official statistics from the postgraduate enrollment website, the number of postgraduate applicants in 2023 reached 4.74 million, which is 170,000 more than last year's 4.57 million, representing a growth rate of 3.72%. Additionally, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors, the employment market in China is facing severe challenges, and graduates from universities are confronted with the pressing issue of a substantial increase in the total number of unemployed individuals, including structural unemployment.

The public administration major, having been established relatively late in China, has not yet gained a high degree of recognition in society due

to its shorter development history. Furthermore, the lack of a clear positioning in the curriculum design results in a lack of self-awareness among public administration students regarding their future development, placing them at a disadvantage in the job market and their career prospects. In contrast to other studies that focus on optimizing the curriculum design to enhance the employability of public administration students, this paper emphasizes the introduction of an online education model and explores the establishment of a blended education approach, combining both online and offline elements, to enhance the employment skills of students majoring in public administration.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The exploration of a blended education model based on the cultivation of employability is influenced by a variety of factors. This article will provide a brief overview of the conceptual framework of the key elements involved in this context.

2.1 Definition of Blended Education Model

The blended education model, also known as hybrid education, refers to an integrated educational approach that combines online education (e-learning) and traditional offline education (classroom-based learning). By leveraging the advantages of both modes, this model aims to transform the education system and significantly improve the overall quality of teaching and learning [1]. In the international educational community, the concept of blended learning was defined by the Sloan Consortium in 1999 as "a combination of a certain proportion of face-to-face instruction and online learning." This implies the integration and mutual reinforcement of both online and offline teaching methods, combining their respective strengths to enhance the overall teaching experience [2]. In China, the idea of blended learning was first introduced in the practical application of curriculum teaching by Professor He Kekang of Beijing Normal University in 2004 [3]. The main difference between these two terms lies in their focus: blended learning primarily emphasizes improvements in course design and optimization of teaching content, while blended education takes a broader perspective, considering aspects such as students' career planning and future development goals, beyond the confines of university course design and teaching content.

2.2 Advantages of the Blended Education Model

In April 2018, the Ministry of Education issued the "2.0 Action Plan for Education Informatization," which called for the vigorous promotion of new talent development models and the exploration of internet-based educational service models under the "Internet+" context. It also emphasized the integration of education and information technology innovation to support and lead the modernization of education development sustainably. This plan provided favorable policy support for the development and application of the blended education model. Moreover, at the end of 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the Ministry of Education to require educational institutions to accelerate the integration of online and traditional offline education modes. After three years of development, the blended education model has evolved from being an emergency teaching tool to an innovative teaching

tool, with the use of technology becoming more mature and gradually gaining public recognition.

As a mode of classroom innovation, the blended education model goes beyond the existing teaching system to provide students with more comprehensive and high-quality knowledge services, while also offering teachers practical experience and a platform for academic development^[4].

Through this educational model, the integration of internet technology with specialized teaching allows learners to move from shallow to deep learning. It enables students to make extensive use of the convenience and vast resources available on the internet, facilitating the extension of their knowledge into deeper levels. Real-time interaction with professors and classmates through the internet helps improve students' learning efficiency and stimulates their enthusiasm for learning.

2.3 Concept and Dimensions of Employment Skills

According to the United States Employment and Education Commission (DFEE), employment skills are not only the process of obtaining employment in the short term but also a long-term dynamic process that involves sustaining employment and facilitating career advancement in subsequent work experiences [5].

Currently, there is no clear consensus on the dimensions of "employment skills" for college students. Based on existing viewpoints and relevant research results from both domestic and international sources, this paper identifies four dimensions of employment skills for students majoring in public administration:

- Professional competence: This dimension primarily encompasses the theoretical knowledge acquired by students during their university studies, their ability to apply professional knowledge, and their job interview and job-seeking skills.
- Learning ability: This dimension focuses on a student's capacity to learn new knowledge and skills in their future employment, as well as their ability to plan their own career path.
- Practical skills: This dimension assesses a student's capability to apply their specialized knowledge to practical work scenarios.

- Adaptability: This dimension involves a student's self-psychological adjustment, communication skills, and interpersonal abilities in the context of employment.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF EMPLOYMENT SKILLS CULTIVATION IN H UNIVERSITY'S PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MAJOR

3.1 Overview of Public Administration Programmes in H University

Overview of H University's Public Administration Major over the past three years from 2019 to 2021, a total of 303 students graduated from the college, with the main majors being public administration, law, and safety engineering. Among them, 57% of graduates majored in public administration, 33% in law, and 10% in safety engineering. Out of the 303 graduates, 225 students secured job offers before graduation (74%), 31 students were still waiting for job opportunities (10%), 29 students found employment after graduation (9.5%), 11 students pursued further education domestically or overseas, 6 students delayed their graduation and were not employed yet, and 1 graduate started their own business successfully. The overall employment rate reached 90%. Among the employed students, 66 entered government agencies, universities, hospitals, or research institutes (approximately 22%), 109 found jobs in state-owned enterprises (approximately 36%), and 79 joined private or foreign-invested enterprises (approximately 26%). Other students were engaged in self-employment or further studies.

3.2 Multi-dimensional Analysis of the Challenges in Employment Skills Cultivation for Public Administration Major

In February 2019, the State Council issued the "China's Education Modernization 2035" plan, which emphasized the use of modern technology to accelerate educational reforms and achieve personalized and innovative talent development. The promotion and application of the blended education model should optimize and innovate course design and training methods based on traditional face-to-face teaching. With the support of internet technology, the integration of online and

offline teaching can incorporate employment skills cultivation into students' career development system, thereby better enhancing the employment skills of students majoring in public administration to adapt to the increasingly challenging job market. However, with the advent of the "Internet +" and big data era, especially under the influence of various new technologies, information, and knowledge, the cultivation direction, programs, and implementation processes for students majoring in public administration are facing unprecedented challenges. From the perspective of one of the dimensions of employment skills, this analysis objectively evaluates some of the difficulties and shortcomings in the cultivation of employment skills for students majoring in public administration at H University.

3.2.1 Unclear Professional Characteristics and Ambiguous Training Objectives

In the traditional educational model, the training direction of the public administration major is formulated according to the "Catalog of Undergraduate Majors of General Higher Education Institutions (2020 Edition)" issued by the Ministry of Education. It aims to cultivate specialized talents with administrative management skills, political and legal knowledge, management abilities, and research capabilities for party and government organs, enterprises, institutions, and social organizations. However, this general training objective has led to a lack of distinctive professional characteristics for students majoring in public administration and a disconnection from the demands of the job market. Students with such generalized training objectives find it challenging to demonstrate significant professional strengths, which in turn reduces their professional competence and competitiveness in the job market.

3.2.2 Insufficient Flexibility in Traditional Offline Teaching and Limited Student Engagement

In the previous course design, the primary mode of teaching was one-way face-to-face instruction by teachers. This teaching method may lead to difficulties in students' acceptance and digestion of knowledge, resulting in disinterest and reduced employment skills. Additionally, the traditional teaching model tends to be mechanical and monotonous, which hinders students from actively engaging in the learning process, leading to a lack of adaptability and flexible thinking. These two

issues create a considerable gap between the employment skills of students under traditional course design and the talent requirements of the job market.

3.2.3 Low Proportion of Practical Course Hours and the Need for Deeper Internship Content

As a social science discipline, the public administration major typically consists of three parts: general courses, specialized courses, and practical courses. The practical courses are closely related to students' application and operational abilities. Although local universities have set up relevant practical courses for students, there are still some issues. Firstly, the proportion of practical courses is relatively low and the types of practical courses are relatively single. Currently, most universities adopt the method of self-guided internships. However, students' internship duration is short, and the proportion of internship hours to total course hours is small, making it difficult for students to gain a deep understanding of professional knowledge. Secondly, during internships, students mainly handle administrative tasks and logistical work, which limits their opportunities for deeper learning and experience. Finally, government departments have limited trust in interns, making it difficult for them to participate in important administrative activities and decision-making. Over time, this may hinder the development of students' practical and administrative capabilities.

3.2.4 Lack of Comprehensive Employment Guidance and the Need for Improved Career Counseling

Currently, employment guidance services in local universities are mainly arranged by the Employment Service Center, which leads to a narrow scope of guidance. Employment guidance mainly focuses on training students in skills for interviews and job applications but overlooks the guidance on career planning and employment concepts. This lack of continuous learning in facing the job market prevents students from adapting to the changing employment landscape. Additionally, some universities lack professional career counseling systems for students, and most psychological courses are conducted by general counselors. Consequently, students may lack targeted guidance, leading to cognitive biases about their own employment abilities and improper career

positioning. This impacts their adaptability to the job market significantly.

4. APPLICATION OF BLENDED EDUCATION TO INNOVATE THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION TRAINING MODEL

The establishment of an efficient mechanism for cultivating graduates' employment skills is of great significance for the development of the public administration discipline and the supply of talents to society. Currently, there are problems with the inadequate personal development of public administration students, the lack of effective employment skills cultivation mechanisms, and poor communication between enterprises and governments. To address these issues, this article proposes corresponding strategies from the aspects of course design, students, faculty, enterprises, and governments, aiming to establish an efficient employment skills cultivation mechanism by introducing the blended education model.

4.1 Optimizing the Course Structure and Dynamically Adjust It

The blended education model breaks through the limitations of traditional public administration course teaching in terms of time and location, which greatly facilitates teachers and students and has gained widespread popularity and support[6]. However, in the course structure design, it is essential to appropriately increase the proportion of practical courses and avoid replicating the structure of traditional offline teaching. Not all courses are suitable for online teaching, especially practical courses that cannot achieve their effects through online education and should be conducted through a combination of online and offline methods. Moreover, the course structure should be designed according to the difficulties that public administration students currently face in the job market. As students lack comprehensive employment guidance, they may have limited access to job market information, leading to a mismatch between their skills and the market's demands. Therefore, the school needs to focus on strengthening the guidance system for online and offline combined training to ensure that employment skills cultivation is integrated throughout the entire university education, avoiding cramming in the final year. Lastly, in the course design of the blended education model, it is essential to insist on dynamically adjusting the

course structure. The school can establish a special working group for blended teaching to adjust the proportion of online and offline teaching modes based on the real-time teaching situation and feedback from teachers and students, avoiding rigidity and thus improving the teaching quality.

4.2 Introducing Virtual Game Workplace Teaching to Enhance Student Engagement

Practical employment skills cultivation based on virtual game workplace experience involves creating simulated work scenarios and opportunities using information technology such as text, animation, and artificial intelligence. Various forms of games, including single-player games, online games, and mobile games, allow students to participate and experience the work environment[7]. Through this experience, students can gain a deep understanding of work processes and job requirements, fully mobilize various learning factors, and master practical operational skills, thus enhancing their practical employment abilities. To enhance student engagement and deepen their understanding of professional course content, virtual game workplace teaching for practical employment skills cultivation can be introduced alongside traditional offline teaching. The virtual game can simulate work processes over time and involve multi-position and multi-task rotational training. A virtual instructor can provide guidance throughout the game, allowing students to vividly reenact theoretical and practical training, work scenarios, and various unexpected events. This experience helps students improve their comprehensive professional qualities, gain relevant work experience, and enhance their professional skills and job adaptability, while also promoting creativity and imagination, making them high-end talent suitable for societal demands.

4.3 Enriching the Diversity of Training Methods and Enhancing Students' Comprehensive Qualities

The establishment of the blended education model based on employment skills does not mean uniformly cultivating students according to the original training plan. Instead, it involves classifying and training students with targeted, scientific, and practical training based on a comprehensive analysis of the difficulties students currently face in the job market. The university can combine online and offline education models to

provide targeted guidance for students based on their employment preferences. For example, in recent years, the popularity of civil service examinations and postgraduate entrance examinations has been on the rise. Most students consider participating in these exams as their primary choice. Therefore, in addition to ensuring the teaching of professional courses, the school can offer online special lectures focusing on "national examinations and postgraduate entrance examinations" to help students improve their competitiveness. Moreover, if some students have the desire to start their own businesses, the school can not only provide guidance based on innovative employment courses but also invite successful business figures from various industries to conduct online employment guidance lectures, significantly broadening students' horizons and understanding of the business market.

4.4 Establishing a Complete "Dual-Teacher" Faculty Team to Promote the Diversification of Training Systems

The construction of a "dual-teacher" faculty team is a concrete manifestation of modernizing employment skills and a guarantee for the development of high-quality employment skills education. Local universities can learn from vocational colleges and establish a "dual-teacher" faculty team to improve the employment skills cultivation model. Universities can invite various stakeholders, such as enterprises and governments, to actively participate in the process and gain a comprehensive understanding of the current situation of "dual-teacher" construction in universities, as well as their needs for policies and resources. For example, the school can express its demand for professional employment psychological counseling and sign contracts with psychological experts to serve as "dual-teacher" faculty members, providing professional psychological counseling to students to overcome psychological barriers related to employment and improve their adaptability to the job market. Furthermore, the university can invite some enterprise executives and government officials to serve as "dual-teacher" faculty members and conduct targeted training for students through online education, thus solving the limitations of time and geography.

4.5 Establishing a "School-Government Collaboration" Model to Promote Deeper Internship Opportunities for Students

Currently, students majoring in public administration at H University mainly face issues such as short internship periods, internships not being directly related to their majors, and difficulties in obtaining a clear understanding of government work through internships. To address these issues, the university can establish and improve the "school-government collaboration" mechanism to provide students with more government internship opportunities. "School-government collaboration" is a new talent training model that has emerged in China in recent years. The specific operation mode involves designating a lecturer to lead a group, and students can independently choose government agencies for internships, with the school arranging internships based on student preferences. This mechanism fully taps into students' initiative, helps reduce the workload of the college, and enables students to combine theoretical knowledge learned in class with practical administrative management experience, enhancing their professional competence and practical capabilities. Through "school-government collaboration," students can integrate theoretical knowledge with practical work experience, thereby gaining a more comprehensive understanding of government work and further promoting the depth of internships.

5. CONCLUSION

The establishment of the hybrid education model based on employment competence is an essential step towards improving the employability of public administration students. However, there are still challenges that need to be addressed, such as ensuring comprehensive teaching support and enhancing teachers' capabilities in using smart teaching tools[8]. By continuously refining the model and learning from successful practices, the hybrid education model can evolve into a more sophisticated and efficient approach, effectively preparing students for future employment.

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