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# Research on the Cultivation of Humanistic Quality in Chinese Higher Vocational Colleges - A Case Study of Zhengzhou Institute of Technology

Yang Huang, Yiran Tian, Oksana Volodko\*

Belarusian National Technical University, 220013, Minsk, Belarus

## KEYWORDS

## ABSTRACT

*Higher Vocational Education;*

*Vocational Education;*

*Humanistic Quality Cultivation;*

*College Students;*

*Sustainable Development of Education*

In recent years, the importance of humanistic quality education has become increasingly prominent. The State Council and the Ministry of Education have issued documents on multiple occasions, clearly stating the need to adhere to moral education and all-round development, and integrate humanistic quality education into the entire process of teaching and education. The author believes that students' humanistic quality can be improved by learning traditional Chinese culture. Taking Zhengzhou Institute of Technology as an example, this paper analyzes the current situation of humanistic quality of students in higher vocational colleges and puts forward strategies for higher vocational colleges to strengthen humanistic quality education from the perspective of traditional Chinese culture.

## INTRODUCTION

Cultivating high-quality workers and technical and skilled talents is the talent training goal of modern vocational education. Among them, "high quality" means that higher vocational colleges should not only focus on the cultivation of technical skills but also pay attention to the quality development of students. Hence, the importance of humanistic quality education is becoming increasingly prominent.

The Latin original of "humanistic education" (liberalis) means "suitable for free people" — individuals who can think independently and freely, both as individuals and members of society. The United States is a country that thoroughly implements this concept of humanistic education, positioning its vocational education as "career and vocational education" where skills serve the "career". While meeting the needs of learners for employment and livelihood, it places greater emphasis on the social nature of education [1]. Therefore, its vocational education has transcended the "survival" level and entered the "life" level: beyond technical skills, it focuses on learning the "social functions

of individuals"; on the basis of meeting the needs of social production, it further enables people to live freely and independently in society. Thus, people can enjoy the happiness of family and society after work.

Germany has a very clear "vocational" orientation in its vocational education. Before 2000, according to the National Certified Vocational Catalogue — the basis for setting up majors in German vocational colleges — majors in vocational colleges were only divided into single majors (which could not be further subdivided) and subdivided majors. After 2000, the optional majors that emerged were only offered for highly specialized and subdivided majors [2]. In the field of vocational education, this more clearly reflects the absolute correspondence between each major and the relevant occupation. Therefore, from the perspective of curriculum design, German vocational education simply serves occupations. For learners, vocational education meets their needs for "preparing for employment, further study, and career change". For enterprises, participating in vocational education is to cultivate and select talents who can meet the

\* Corresponding author. E-mail address: [hy660327@gmail.com](mailto:hy660327@gmail.com)

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"vocational" needs of the enterprise. For education providers, all educational activities revolve around "occupations".

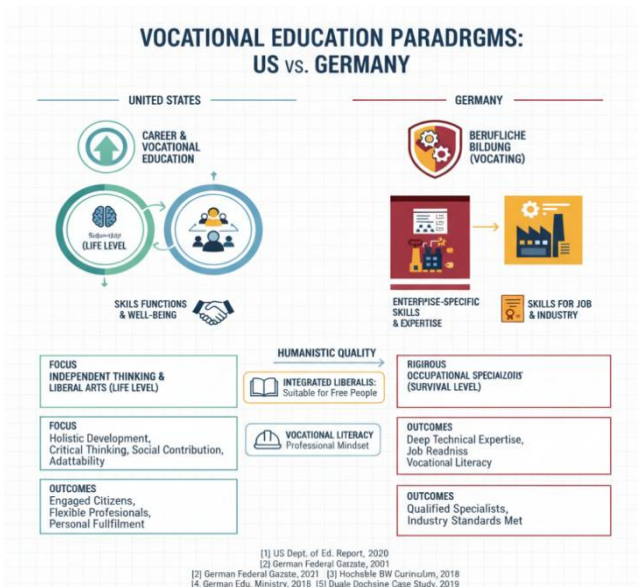
In Germany's advanced vocational education sector, whether it is universities of applied sciences, vocational colleges, or dual-system universities in Baden-Württemberg, the main courses are professional basic courses, professional theory courses, and professional practical courses that are directly related to employment. Among the general basic courses, only courses such as "Overview of Economy and Society" are offered, which help students understand social and industry conditions and thus make better career choices [3]. Elective courses account for only 10-15% of the curriculum system, and these electives must be professional courses in the corresponding occupational field or focusing on occupational priorities, rather than history or humanities and art courses as generally understood in humanistic education [4].

In addition to the setup of majors and courses, German vocational colleges emphasize more on enabling students to attempt to complete specific tasks of a company while still at school in terms of teaching methods. The assessment methods mainly include internship reports, special research, or professional design, which are essentially in advance practicing or summarizing future work content. In this rigorous vocational atmosphere, humanistic education is mostly interpreted as "vocational literacy". Through in-school teaching and experiential learning, students are made to fully meet the professional expectations of enterprises in both technical skills and mindset [5].

## 1. Vocational Colleges Feature Enterprise Demand Orientation

Vocational education is positioned as public vocational education and emphasizes sociality. However, this sociality is not based on the trivialized concept of "individuals" or "communities", nor on the overly generalized concept of "society", but on enterprises that connect these elements. Due to the existence of the traditional lifelong employment system, enterprises form a small society similar to a family. Compared with other countries, German enterprises invest the most in vocational colleges and are most willing to do so. For enterprises, vocational education institutions are bases for cultivating "family members", so enterprises, consortia, or trade unions are willing to provide funds, venues, teachers, and all other conveniences for vocational education. Their investment can be regarded as care and investment in future "family members". Similarly, vocational colleges are more dependent on enterprises. Vocational colleges often invite experts from local enterprises to form professional committees, which analyze and demonstrate the current demand and development trend of technical talents for existing positions in local enterprises, predict the level, specifications, and quantity of talents needed in the next few years, and then determine the orientation of majors. Therefore, the major setup of vocational colleges is closely related to the needs of local enterprises, with a strong focus on cultivating employees required by local enterprises; moreover, they will timely adjust the curriculum according to changes in enterprises' work requirements for employees to meet enterprise needs. Some vocational colleges also undertake the training and further education of in-service employees of enterprises to provide talent support for the development of enterprises.

From the perspective of vocational education curriculum design, students receiving vocational education in China spend their entire learning experience in vocational colleges to find and adapt to a position in the future enterprise "family". Taking the curriculum of the Health and Nutrition major at Zhengzhou Institute of Technology as an example, the courses offered are divided into general basic courses, professional theory courses, and professional elective courses, as shown in the table below. All learning is aimed at undertaking certain work in the future "family"; while the study of professional elective courses and humanistic courses in general basic courses (such as Constitution,



**Fig.1.**The main differences between the vocational education methods of the United States and Germany

Psychology, Interpersonal Relationships, Society and Individuals) is to meet the psychological, communication, entertainment, and other needs required for life in the future enterprise "family". The clear division of labor in school club activities, the strict seniority system in schools, and humanistic behaviors in teaching (such as the intergenerational transfer of textbooks) are actually the cultivation and practice of a sense of "belonging" to the family. Therefore, the positioning of humanistic education in China's current vocational education is essentially the learning and pre-practice of the technologies and ideas that learners need in the future enterprise "family", with a distinct "enterprise-oriented" feature.

## **2.China's Vocational Education is Characterized by "Industrial Education" in Another Aspect**

Vocational education is sometimes referred to as "industrial education", but more accurately, it should be "industrial talent education". Its service orientation is not simply enterprises, but the relatively broader concept of "industry". In the process of vocational education, greater emphasis is placed on enhancing the sustainability of short-term vocational education content and exerting the value of vocational education in the lifelong development of individuals. In higher vocational education institutions in some regions of China, under the concept of "Leading the Future", during the vocational education learning stage, learners can obtain the most practical skills for a certain position in the industry through professional skill courses closely related to occupations; acquire solid professional basic knowledge and theories through basic courses such as Computer Science and English and relevant professional theory courses, thereby laying the foundation for self-directed learning and improvement of technical skills; cultivate innovation ability, professional awareness, and basic attitudes and awareness towards society in the industry through enterprise internships and innovation research courses, increasing the possibility of promotion in the industry; gain the knowledge foundation for transitioning from an executor to a manager after promotion through compulsory literacy courses that cultivate basic management capabilities (such as Career and Economy, Production Management); and realize the possibility of life beyond work through optional literacy courses such as Health and

Life Public Welfare Activities.

It can be said that China's vocational education can meet most of the needs of learners for survival and development in a certain industry in the future. The entire range of qualities required for learners to grow from technical workers to technical backbones, and then to service personnel and managers in a certain industry can be well established in vocational education institutions. Additionally, learners can acquire the entertainment and life-related content necessary for long-term persistence in a certain industry. China's vocational education tends to cultivate comprehensive workplace talents, and its educational positioning is reflected in meeting all the needs of individuals for lifelong development in a certain industrial field.

## **3.China's Vocational Education is Developing with the Goal of Pursuing All-Round Development and Meeting Diverse Needs**

The humanistic education in China's vocational education aims to meet the needs of the country, society, enterprises, and individual learners, and it is difficult to summarize it with a single concept.

The curriculum setup in Chinese higher vocational colleges includes the following categories: ideological and political courses that embody the function of moral education and cultivate students' correct outlook on life and values; public basic courses such as Computer Science and English that train basic skills; professional basic courses that cultivate professional basic knowledge and theories and help students achieve self-directed learning and sustainable development in future work; professional courses and practical courses that practice professional skills and enable students to directly enter enterprises in a certain professional field after graduation; and a large number of elective courses (such as literature, history, philosophy, calligraphy, and fine arts) that expand students' knowledge scope and humanistic quality, allowing students to choose according to their own interests and needs. Moreover, in the teaching of all courses, teachers will consciously or unconsciously integrate the cultivation of students' professional quality and professional spirit; outside of teaching, rich and colorful club activities are held to exercise students' social life and activity abilities. In some colleges and universities, students' participation in these activities is also counted into credits in the form of moral

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education credits. The pursuit of "comprehensiveness" can be clearly seen from the professional teaching plan and the list of optional courses for the 2024 Accounting major at Zhengzhou Institute of Technology (as shown below)[6].

The emergence of this situation is attributed to complex historical and practical reasons in China. Since modern times, the fact that backward science and technology led to national weakness and poverty has made it urgent for us to introduce technical education from the West. The concept of "theory as guidance" makes it impossible for us to abandon the teaching of basic vocational theories; while under the increasingly severe employment situation in modern society, the cultivation and training of technical skills have inevitably become the focus. It can be said that even today, China's higher vocational education is still striving to explore the optimal balance between humanistic quality education and technical/vocational education. Since this balance is closely related to the rapid changes in the economy and society, in fact, humanism and technology have always been in a state of fluctuation in the implementation of modern vocational education in China. In this fluctuation, there are experiences and lessons, and strictly speaking, it is difficult to draw absolute conclusions of right or wrong. For researchers and practitioners of China's higher vocational education today, the issue of the perfect integration of humanistic quality and vocational education is a topic we have been exploring — or rather, we are still "on the way". It requires more efforts to study and discuss, a longer time of refinement and tempering, and more participation and verification in practice, so that we can expect to truly establish a vocational education model that conforms to China's national conditions, or in other words, a "socialist vocational education with Chinese characteristics" in the future.

### 4. Investigation on the Current Situation of Humanistic Quality of Students in Higher Vocational Colleges - A Case Study of Zhengzhou Institute of Technology

To reflect the current situation of humanistic quality of students in higher vocational colleges, the author conducted a survey among students of Zhengzhou Institute of Technology.

### 4.1. Survey Overview

This survey was conducted by distributing questionnaires online, and a total of 531 valid questionnaires were collected. The survey content consists of four parts: humanistic attitude, humanistic knowledge, behavioral performance, and the current situation of humanistic education in the school.

The questionnaire results show the following:

- 1) Humanistic Attitude: 86.23% of students believe that humanistic quality is as important as professional skills; 92.73% of students believe that humanistic quality education is conducive to the all-round development of students' quality and the cultivation of a healthy personality. Most students express their love for excellent traditional Chinese culture.
- 2) Humanistic Knowledge: 70.17% of students believe that their own humanistic quality needs to be improved; nearly half of the students believe that humanistic quality education in higher vocational colleges should be undertaken through courses.
- 3) Behavioral Performance: Most students abide by basic social ethics and norms.
- 4) Current Situation of School Humanistic Education: Most students are basically satisfied with the school's humanistic curriculum setup; at the same time, they are more willing to attend classes taught by teachers with good humanistic quality and prefer campus activities related to art.

### 4.2. Analysis of Results

This survey was conducted by Based on the above survey results, we can draw the following conclusions:

- 1) Students generally recognize the importance of humanistic quality education, believe that their own humanistic quality needs improvement, and hold that classrooms should bear the main responsibility for humanistic quality education.
- 2) Excellent traditional Chinese culture is popular among students.
- 3) The college stage is a crucial period for the formation of students' value orientation. The social trend of fast pace and advance consumption has a strong impact on students' ideology. Schools should pay special attention to guidance and education in this regard to cultivate students' correct outlook on values and consumption.
- 4) Schools should carry out more art-related campus



activities according to students' interests.

- 5) Teachers with high humanistic quality are more popular among students, so it is necessary to strengthen the improvement of teachers' humanistic quality.

### **4.3.Approaches and Strategies for Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into Humanistic Quality Education**

As analyzed above, strengthening humanistic quality education in higher vocational colleges is not only the embodiment of educational spirit but also the need of students themselves. Deeply exploring the educational function of traditional Chinese culture to improve the humanistic quality of vocational college students can not only align with students' interests but also further promote and carry forward traditional Chinese culture.

#### **4.3.1.Offer General Courses and Humanistic Lectures Related to Traditional Chinese Culture to Enrich Students' Cultural Foundation**

Humanistic quality education transcends disciplines and majors. Higher vocational colleges should break the separation between liberal arts and sciences and provide universal humanistic education for students. For example, many higher vocational colleges do not offer "College Chinese" for science students, and some even cancel the course entirely. Taking Yangzhou Polytechnic Institute as an example, the college suspended "College Chinese" for 10 years, resumed it in 2017, and reformed the teaching materials, focusing on the teaching of traditional classics such as Tang poetry and Song ci, which was highly popular among students. Another example is Tsinghua University and Huazhong University of Science and Technology, which have opened "humanistic lectures" focusing on traditional Chinese culture, and these lectures are always fully attended. Drawing inspiration from this, higher vocational colleges should appropriately offer general courses and knowledge lectures related to traditional Chinese culture to enhance students' cultural foundation.

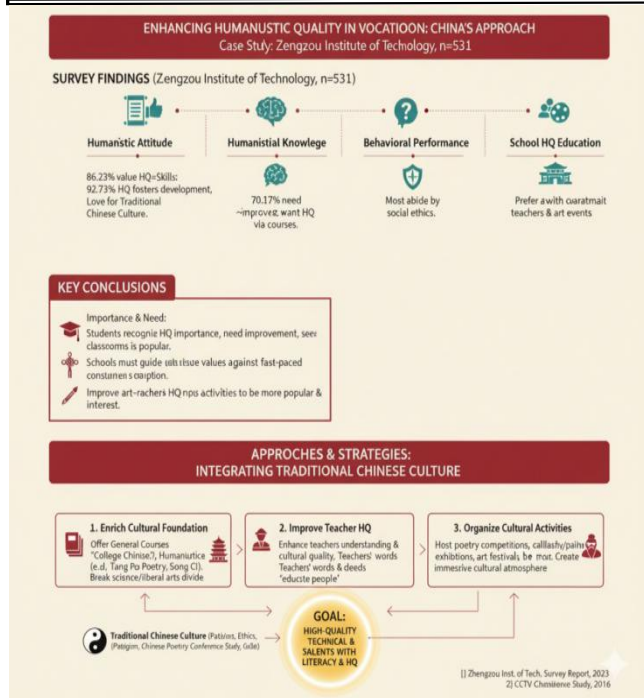
#### **4.3.2.Improve Teachers' Understanding of Traditional Chinese Culture to Influence Students Imperceptibly**

The role of teachers for students is not only to impart textbook knowledge and life experience but also to influence and nurture students through their words, deeds, and character, ultimately achieving the goal of "educating people" through the practical act of "teaching". Therefore, the level of teachers' humanistic quality is particularly important. The survey shows that teachers with high humanistic quality are more popular among students. Higher vocational colleges should effectively enhance teachers' understanding of traditional Chinese culture and improve their cultural quality, so that teachers can influence and transform students accordingly. Just imagine, which student does not like a teacher who is eloquent and highly talented?

#### **4.3.3 Organize Rich and Colorful Cultural and Artistic Activities Centered on Traditional Chinese Culture to Enrich Campus Life**

Since its launch, CCTV's Chinese Poetry Conference has been deeply loved by the public and triggered a national upsurge of love for classical Chinese poetry. This shows that traditional Chinese culture has a solid mass foundation — as long as the form is appropriate, it can arouse people's love. Higher vocational colleges should organize more similar cultural and artistic activities centered on traditional Chinese culture, such as poetry competitions and calligraphy and painting exhibitions, to create a good atmosphere for traditional Chinese culture, thereby achieving the goal of learning traditional culture and improving humanistic quality.

Traditional Chinese culture is broad and profound, containing rich humanistic spirits — such as the strong feelings of family and country, the value orientation of prioritizing righteousness over profit, the noble character of honesty and trustworthiness, and the enterprising spirit of self-improvement. All of these are rich sources for nurturing students' humanistic quality. Higher vocational colleges should deeply explore the educational function of traditional Chinese culture, improve students' humanistic quality, and cultivate technical and skilled talents with cultural literacy and high quality.



**Fig.2.** Approaches and Strategies for Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into Humanistic Quality Education

## Conclusion

The humanistic education environment of vocational education is a special environment, which is influenced by many factors such as history and culture, social development, and educational beliefs. In the construction of campus environment, it is necessary to combine the school's natural and humanistic background, focus on the integration of cultural spirit — especially the cultural spirit of modern Chinese universities — so that the university cultural spirit can be nurtured and reflected in the campus environment. This will enhance the cultural value of the campus environment and promote the cultivation of modern cultural spirit among college students. Implementing humanistic quality education in vocational education through the beautification of the university campus environment is an important direction and concept for campus environment construction.

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