

Research on the connotation, model construction and training approach of normal students' employability

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Abstract

The employability of normal students, from the perspective of performance orientation, that is, the ability that normal university students should have to obtain their ideal jobs that are commensurate with their qualifications and levels, which reflects the comprehensive results of their learning in school and represents the quality of teacher training in normal universities. In order to deeply explore the relationship and internal mechanism of improving the employability factors of normal students, and to improve the quality of teachers. This paper is based on the current analysis and existing research systematically analyzes the three dimensions of employability of normal students, including behavioral ability, adaptability, and individual characteristics, and constructs a model and scale of normal students' employability. Furthermore, based on the above conclusions, some suggestions are put forward for the comprehensive quality training of normal students in local universities.

Keywords

Employability of normal students; Education reform; Faculty development.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the employability of normal students has been at a relatively low level, specifically manifested in the following aspects: 1) insufficient basic work abilities, such as weak communication skills, innovative abilities, and adaptability; 2) inadequate pedagogical skills, such as limited ability to write teaching plans, chalkboard writing skills, classroom control abilities, and mastery of teaching demeanor; 3) lack of career development abilities, such as unscientific career orientation, lack of a correct employment view, and poor job-seeking skills. The main cause of these phenomena is the relatively lagging educational and teaching reforms in local normal universities, which is reflected in the current outdated teaching content and methods, low-quality educational practice, and a weak normal faculty team. This is also a prominent issue that needs to be addressed by local normal universities in China. In addition, some local normal universities offer only the traditional "old three" courses of Education, Psychology, and Subject Teaching Theory to normal students, with outdated, redundant, and superficial course content. This, coupled with surface-level teaching, leads to a gap between the trained teachers and the actual needs of primary and secondary schools and kindergartens. Many teachers in normal universities still adopt a teaching method centered on the classroom, the teacher, and the textbook, focusing more on knowledge transmission and paying insufficient attention to the cultivation of teaching and educational management competence. In response to the aforementioned issues, the Ministry of Education issued the "Opinion on the Implementation of the Excellent Teacher Training Program" in 2014, with the aim of promoting

comprehensive reform of teacher training mechanisms, curricula, teaching methods, faculty, and quality evaluation in normal universities. In order to better promote and implement the aforementioned "Opinion", the Ministry of Education introduced an enhanced version of the "Excellent Teacher Training Program", namely the "Excellent Teacher Training Program 2.0.2", in 2018. According to relevant documents from the Ministry of Education, there is a growing urgency for local normal universities to strengthen their own educational and teaching reforms in order to improve the quality of teacher training by enhancing the employability of normal students. This is done in order to meet the social demand for excellent teachers and the public's need for high-quality education.

2. Connotation interpretation

The connotation of normal students' employability mainly manifests in three aspects: 1) the competence that normal students need to possess to secure ideal jobs commensurate with their qualifications; 2) the degree of adaptability and endurance that normal students need to have in fulfilling their teaching responsibilities; 3) the individual characteristics displayed by normal students in engaging in educational activities and achieving the development of their teaching careers.

From the perspective of performance orientation, the connotation of normal students' employability refers to the capabilities that normal students need to have to secure ideal jobs commensurate with their qualifications. After graduation, normal students engage in teaching careers, so the capabilities they need to have are the same as those required for the teaching profession, that is, teaching professional behavioral abilities, such as educational and teaching abilities and related skills. Starting from this connotation, the behavioral abilities of normal students refer to whether the professional behavioral abilities they possess meet the demands of teaching positions, which reflects the issue of whether normal students can do it or not. According to the analysis results of the interview data, behavioral ability refers to the professional behavioral ability of teachers shown by normal university students when they are engaged in the teaching profession, including teaching ability, educating ability and management ability. Among them, teaching ability refers to the behavior characteristics displayed by teachers to achieve teaching objectives and engage in teaching activities smoothly. For normal students' employability, teaching ability is their most basic behavioral ability, known as their "core competence." From the perspective of performance orientation, teachers need to achieve "teach well" first. In the interviews, when teachers discussed teaching abilities, the main aspects involved were professional competence, fundamental teaching skills, teaching methods, and teaching demeanor.

2.1. Professional competence

During the interviews, when asked "What abilities can support teachers in better completing teaching tasks?". Teachers generally mentioned professional competence, and explained professional competence in terms of two characteristics of knowledge.

First, the rigor of knowledge. Teachers should try to avoid "scientific errors" as much as possible, because once such errors occur, the course they teach is rated as a "C-level course" (i.e. a failing course). Second, the breadth of knowledge. Many normal students do not pay much attention to knowledge accumulation during their university years, believing that teaching primary school students does not require such extensive professional knowledge, which often leads to difficulties and limitations in their teaching.

Based on the above views, having solid professional knowledge can reduce or even avoid "scientific errors" and enrich teaching content. However, professional competence is not simply equivalent to professional knowledge; "thinking like a mathematician" gives us more insights.

Teachers with professional competence can not only reduce errors and enrich course content, but also guide students in learning through exploration. For teachers to achieve "teach well", they should not only focus on knowledge transmission, but also guide students on how to think. In this sense, professional competence is at the core of teaching ability, reflecting the content of teaching.

2.2. Fundamental teaching skills

Foundational teaching skills serve as the foundation of a teacher's teaching competence and are essential professional skills required for teaching work. Issues such as unclear teaching objectives, improper time allocation, unsmooth teaching procedures, and the "one-man show" phenomenon in classroom teaching are all caused by a lack of mastery of the basic skills of teaching. Teachers have diverse interpretations of teaching fundamental skills. Some consider them to be language expression and on-the-spot adaptability, while others believe they encompass classroom time management, writing standards, slide production, and other aspects. There are also those who view fundamental teaching skills as pertaining to classroom teaching design.

To sum up the above views, foundational teaching skills refer to the teaching skills of teachers, involving multiple aspects such as language expression, writing, teaching design, organizing the classroom, teaching evaluation, and the use of modern technology. It is an important part of a teacher's "core competence." Teaching foundational skills are a comprehensive behavioral performance of teachers in the classroom, such as teachers speaking loudly, pronouncing clearly, using fluent language, combining fast and slow delivery, accurately using disciplinary language, and achieving a natural, emotional, infectious, and enlightening effect. This is a teacher's "true skill" and a specific manifestation of a teacher's "core competence." As some teachers say, "One minute on stage, ten years of practice off stage." To possess such "true skill" and cultivate this "core competence," normal students need to put in more effort to prepare and train. In this sense, foundational teaching skills are the foundation of teaching ability, reflecting the proficiency of teaching.

2.3. Teaching methods

Newly-appointed normal students generally face two major problems: unfamiliarity with the application of teaching methods and insufficient reserves. Some novice teachers are continuously exploring and attempting to apply various teaching methods in their subjects and courses. During interviews with some novice teachers, we also collected some of their own experiences. Combining the above teachers' opinions, teaching methods refer to the methods that teachers use to achieve teaching objectives and tasks in teaching, which is what teachers commonly refer to as "routines." Teaching methods require continuous accumulation and training through learning and practice, and also need to be summarized based on personal characteristics to develop more "routines." There are many teaching methods, such as lecturing, discussion, demonstration, experimentation, and inquiry, etc.

Teaching ability is regarded as a teacher's "core competence," and in order to master this skill, it is essential for teachers to be proficient in the application of teaching methods. Teachers seeking to achieve "excellence" in teaching must first know "how to teach." Therefore, teaching methods are one of the key aspects of teaching ability, reflecting the means of instruction. Teaching is both a science and an art, a challenge and a scholarly pursuit. Mastering effective teaching methods is indeed a difficult task.

2.4. Teaching demeanor

In interviews, many teachers repeatedly mentioned the word "teaching demeanor," which indirectly reflects it as an important part of teaching ability. Some normal students have also received favor from employers due to their positive "teaching demeanor."

Regarding the concept of "teaching demeanor", some teachers describe it as the state of a teacher during a class, through which they aim to infect and motivate students, forming effective interaction. Teaching demeanor is a natural state that enables students to naturally integrate into the teacher's classroom.

In summary, "teaching demeanor" refers to the state of a teacher when giving a lecture, interacting with students through listening, gestures, expressions, posture, and language, and gradually forming a unique teaching style and manner. A good "teaching demeanor" means that teachers should pay attention to students, have a sense of interaction and affinity in teaching, and always pay attention to students' changes. Therefore, "teaching demeanor" is also one of the key aspects of teaching ability, reflecting the state of teaching as perceived by students.

3. Research results

This paper integrates the findings of previous studies on employability, combined with the analysis of interview data, to systematically analyze the components of employability and constructs a model of employability for normal students. The model demonstrates the teaching abilities included in the employability of normal students, including the core elements of behavioral ability, adaptability, and personal characteristics in their employability. It also captures the main thread of the relationship among the complex elements and reveals the intrinsic mechanism of the formation and development of employability, laying the theoretical foundation for further in-depth research on the relationship among employability elements.

Through empirical verification, this paper has developed an employability scale for normal students. This scale provides a tool for further research on employability and helps normal students to self-check and self-evaluate their employability. It enables them to identify their strengths and weaknesses in a timely manner, providing a scientific basis for the enhancement of their employability.

Firstly, the employability of normal students refers to the abilities, talents, and personality traits displayed by normal students in various activities for obtaining teaching positions, which are based on their physical and mental qualities and developed through learning or practice. Its connotation is embodied in the abilities that normal students should have to obtain ideal jobs that are commensurate with their qualifications and levels of competence, the degree of adaptability and tolerance in performing teaching responsibilities, and the personality traits displayed in engaging in educational activities and achieving the development of their teaching careers.

Secondly, the employability model of normal students consists of three dimensions: behavioral ability, adaptability, and personality traits. Behavioral ability includes two elements: teaching ability and educational management competence; adaptability includes three elements: learning ability, communication ability, and stress resistance ability; personality traits include three elements: professional interest, self-confidence, and personal quality.

Thirdly, both adaptability and personality traits have a significant positive impact on behavioral ability, with adaptability playing a mediating role. When viewed in terms of dimensions, learning ability, communication ability, and stress resistance within adaptability all have a significant positive impact on teaching ability and educational management competence; meanwhile, career interest, self-confidence, and personal qualities within personality traits also have a significant positive impact on teaching ability and educational management competence. It is worth noting that learning ability, communication ability, and stress resistance within adaptability also serve as mediators in the relationship between personality traits and behavioral ability in terms of teaching ability and educational management competence.

Fourthly, there are significant differences in the employability of normal students in terms of internship duration, student leadership experience, teacher qualification acquisition, and employment status. Through difference testing, there are no significant differences in the various dimensions of employability by gender, but there are significant differences in internship duration, student leadership experience, and teacher qualification acquisition. In general, students' teaching ability, educational management competence, adaptability, and individual characteristics improved with the increase of internship time. Students with student leadership experience have significantly higher educational management competence, adaptability, and individual characteristics than those without such experience. Students who obtained teacher qualification certificates significantly outperformed those who did not. In addition, employment and party membership are also factors that affect the employability of normal students. There are significant differences in teaching ability between employed and unemployed students, with the teaching ability of employed students being significantly higher than that of unemployed students, while there is no significant difference in educational management competence, adaptability, and individual characteristics. The only significant difference between members and non-members of the party is in terms of career interests, where the career interests of party members are significantly higher than those of non-members.

Fifthly, the development of employability among normal students is uneven, characterized by strong individual characteristics and adaptability, but weaker behavioral abilities, resulting in a significant gap compared to the employability of young teachers. The uneven development of employability among normal students is reflected in the highest scores in the dimension of individual characteristics, indicating a strong interest in the profession; slightly above-average scores in adaptability, but inadequate stress tolerance; and the lowest scores in behavioral abilities, indicating overall weakness. There are significant differences between the employability of normal students and young teachers. The scores of young teachers in teaching ability, educational management competence, adaptability, and individual characteristics are significantly higher than those of teacher education students, especially in the area of educational management competence.

Sixthly, there is a large gap between the employability of normal students and actual job requirements. According to the data from the assessment survey of normal students' employability levels, there is still a large gap between the employability levels of normal students and job requirements. Normal students have gaps in employability and various abilities, with the largest gap in behavioral abilities and the second largest in adaptability. Among the relatively smaller gaps, individual characteristics come first, followed by professional abilities, learning abilities, teaching methods, organizational and leadership abilities, and communication abilities. Further down the list are personal qualities, communication abilities, learning abilities, confidence, with the smallest gaps being in career interests and stress tolerance.

This paper focuses on the composition, model, and measurement of teacher education students' employability, providing a comprehensive and objective revelation of the internal structure and overall level of teacher education students' employability. It also opens up a new perspective for further exploring the relationships between the elements of teacher education students' employability and the intrinsic mechanisms for their enhancement.

4. Strategies and suggestions

In order to enhance the employability of normal students in local universities, based on the above summary, this article proposes suggestions for the cultivation of normal students in local universities.

First and foremost, it is crucial to attach great importance to the cultivation of normal students' employability, and deepen our understanding of the connotation of their employability. Normal students' employability is composed of various elements and is an organic entity in which personal characteristics, adaptability, and behavioral abilities interact, interplay, and merge with each other, continuously growing and developing. Local normal universities should indeed enhance their understanding of the connotation of normal students' employability, focus on stimulating students' intrinsic motivation, cultivate their adaptability, and train their behavioral abilities. Meanwhile, due to the mediating role of adaptability, as well as the stability of personal characteristics and the long-term nature of behavioral ability formation, the importance of adaptability cultivation is particularly prominent. Therefore, local normal universities should attach greater importance to cultivating the adaptability of normal students, which includes learning ability, communication ability, and stress-resistance ability, in order to better promote the enhancement of normal students' employability.

Secondly, it is essential to adopt effective measures to enhance the employability of normal students. This can be achieved by extending the internship duration of normal students, strengthening the relevant training for the teacher qualification examination, and other methods. Through differentiated analysis, it is observed that there are significant differences in the employability of normal students in terms of internship duration, student leadership experience, teacher qualification acquisition, and other factors. Therefore, on the one hand, local normal universities should take corresponding measures: pay attention to the control of the internship link, appropriately increase the internship duration to enhance employability; actively encourage students to participate in the teacher qualification examination and provide targeted training; encourage normal students to serve as student leaders and participate in various student activities to improve their abilities through practical experience; and strengthen the training of normal students' teaching abilities to facilitate their early employment. On the other hand, normal students should actively participate in various school activities and proactively assume student work responsibilities to improve their communication skills, stress resistance, organizational management abilities, and so on. During internships, they should learn actively from teachers, be good at observing and reflecting to develop their teaching and educational management competence; actively participate in the teacher qualification examination to prepare for their future careers while enhancing their theoretical knowledge and practical abilities accordingly.

Thirdly, regularly organize students to undergo employability assessments, and target the areas where they are lacking to provide focused guidance and training. Local normal universities should regularly organize students to conduct employability assessments. On the one hand, the university can provide targeted guidance and training for normal students, while on the other hand, it also allows normal students to have a full understanding of their own abilities and actively carry out learning and training to address their shortcomings. Through comparative analysis with young teachers, it is clear that the educational management competence of young teachers are significantly higher than those of normal students. Through gap analysis, the largest gap in the employability of normal students is in the field of educational guidance. Therefore, local normal universities should attach importance to the development of behavioral ability, especially the cultivation of educational management competence among normal students, and provide targeted guidance and training to improve the educational management competence of normal students.

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