

A Comparison of Vocational Education in China and Japan

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Abstract

After more than 30 years of reform and development, vocational education in Japan has become more and more adapted to the market requirements, and graduates from vocational education schools are popular in industries. This article compares vocational education in China and Japan from the education system, education idea, teaching method, and teaching faculty construction and proposes some opinions on the reform of vocational education in China.

Keywords

Vocational Education in Japan; Professional School; Higher Vocational and Technical Education.

1. Introduction

After many years of vocational education development, Japan has gradually become one of the relatively developed countries in vocational education around the world. Modern vocational education in Japan started in the Mingzhi Reform Period. From the occurrence of the earliest modern vocational education school to the formal incorporation of vocational education into the education system and the establishment of the vocational education system, it took Japan less than 30 years. Vocational education in Japan has developed into an advanced modern vocational education system rapidly from a backward apprenticeship system in more than 30 years. The vocational education system has provided various technical management personnel and skilled labor forces for the society, and has made Japan's post-war economy rapidly recovered and developed, and made Japan the world's second largest economy. From these miracles, people have realistically and profoundly felt the power of vocational education. By reviewing the historical development course of vocational education in Japan and thinking over the characteristics of the development of vocational education in Japan, we can learn from the development of vocational education and help boost the development of vocational education in China. [1]

2. Education system

Pluralistic education system will help cultivate pluralistic vocational talents.

In Japan, after finishing the study in senior high school and passing the entrance examination, the students can enter into the universities, and then after another 4 years of study, the students can obtain the bachelor's degree after graduation. Also, the students can enter into junior colleges. The schooling period for junior colleges is 2 or 3 years. The students can obtain associate bachelor's degree after graduation from junior colleges. In the meantime, the students can also choose to study in professional schools to finish their higher education and realize their employment objectives.

Through the comparison between Chinese higher junior colleges and Japanese professional schools, there are big differences between them in the education system, as is shown in Fig.1:

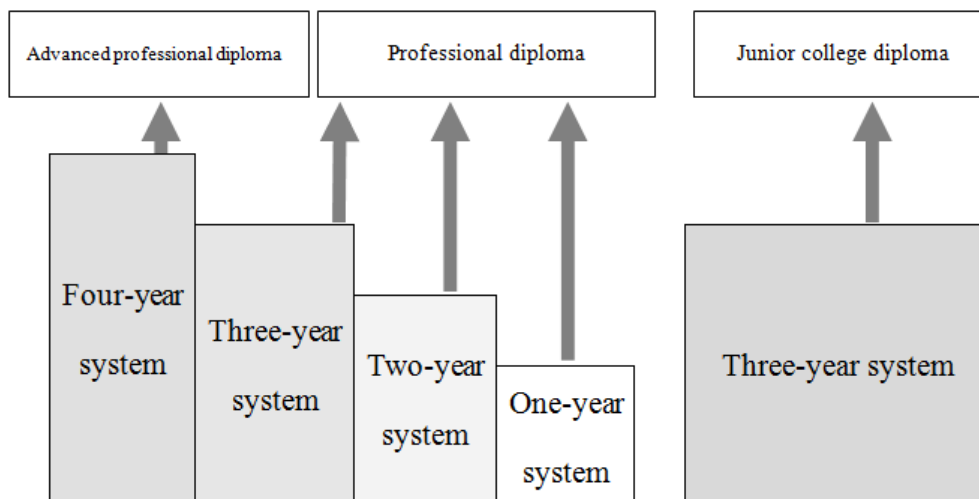


Fig. 1 Comparison of Education Systems between Japanese Professional Schools and Chinese Higher Vocational Schools

Education systems of professional schools in Japan are flexible, and may include one-year to four-year systems according to different specialties, and the advanced professional diploma for graduates accepting four-year system is equivalent to the bachelor's degree and the student with the advanced professional diploma can study for a master's degree. In China, higher vocational schools adopt three-year education system. Only after obtaining an equivalent education level, the student may continue to study for a master's degree after passing the examination.

Through the comparison, we can see that the monotonicity of education system of higher vocational colleges in China is relatively obvious, while professional schools in Japan are relatively flexible in education with multiple education systems and multi-level education modes. Japanese schools can establish the teaching program according to the difficulty of the specialty and the quantity of the required teaching content, and the students can choose different education system to finish their studies according to their own conditions and requirements. The monotonous education system, i.e. the three-year system for higher vocational schools in China is a little too simple under the diversified teaching content, multi-layered teaching difficulty and individualized teaching objects. Whether it is possible to subdivide the education system of higher vocational schools deserves to be explored and thought over.

3. Education idea

Definite education idea will define the correct education direction.

To cultivate what kind of talents is the precondition to carry out all teaching activities for higher vocational schools. In China, a higher education hierarchy has been formed in the long term, namely "doctor – master – bachelor – junior college student" and that is our traditional idea. People always think that the junior college education is inferior to the undergraduate education, and therefore there is the inherent thought that the junior college students have poor ability to learn, excellent junior college students can be upgraded to university students. In Japan, the professional schools and universities are two parallel education modes with different education ideas and objectives.

With the occurrence of special training schools, especially the establishment of the position of professional schools in the school education system, dual-track education system has occurred in Japan's school education system. One is the degree education integrating the junior colleges, universities and graduate schools; the other is the professional schools with the advantages in professional training and skills training. Although professional schools do not have the so-called degree, and have only the title of "professional diploma", it has exceeded junior colleges in the enrollment of students and students' employment opportunities. Besides, many university graduates or junior college graduates and even postgraduate students enter into professional schools for further

study to learn professional and practical skills and obtain national or professional qualification certificates under the condition of having difficulty in finding jobs due to the lack of practical skills and abilities. Meanwhile, when choosing to accept further study in professional schools, the students will consider about their own education level on one hand, but more importantly, they will consider more about their own interests and hobbies as well as their future employment.

Where does the social identity of Japanese professional schools come from? It mainly comes from the education ideas of the professional schools. The highest education level in professional schools is “professional diploma”. The evaluation of “professional diploma” is different from the former evaluation based on degree education. It takes “What have you mastered?” and “What can you do?” as the evaluation criteria to evaluate the learning results. Therefore, talents cultivated by professional schools under vocational education must have certain professional theoretical knowledge and practical operational ability and the students should be trained to obtain professional qualification certificates recognized by the state. In this way, such professional talents with “skills”, “qualifications” and “knowledge” will have more advantages compared with those university students or junior college students that only pay attention to professional theoretical knowledge and ignore practical skills.

“Ability-based” and “employment-oriented” ideas are gradually deepened along with the construction of vocational education in China. Through constant exploration and reform, the students, the parents and the society may change their understanding of “junior colleges” over time. The inherent thought should be changed to that: “university education and junior college education” are two parallel higher education modes; junior college students are students that have powerful strength in practical abilities; “students shifted from junior colleges to universities” is more appropriate for junior colleges that accept education in universities.

Besides, another two modern education ideas in Japan are worth mentioning: humane education and international education.

The first is the humane education, also known as the human’s moral education and humanistic education. It is what we lack in our education process. In Japan, it is common that teachers and students will greet each other when they meet, and students in lower grades will show respect to students in higher grades. This phenomenon is significantly associated with traditional culture in Japan. But I believe that respect and the basic politeness between people are the most essential quality each of us should have, and should be infused into our education content through etiquette education and humanistic education.

The second is the international education. Today’s China is playing a more and more important role in global economy. College students must have the ambition to go to the world. Therefore, to actively carry out international cooperation and international exchange is another important idea for modern education, and certainly, it is also the development trend of China’s higher vocational schools in the future.

4. Teaching methods

Perfect teaching methods will ensure good teaching effects.

Novel teaching methods adopted by Japanese professional schools are also worth to be learned from. As is mentioned above, the dominant idea for education in professional schools is the students’ employment. Therefore, employment guidance will penetrate the entire teaching processes. Newly enrolled students need to accept a scientific questionnaire so that the schools can have an understanding of the students’ employment tendency. In this way, the teachers can have a definite idea in choosing the teaching methods so that they can better realize individualized teaching; in the meantime, students can also get a chance to know and understand themselves so that they can better formulate future learning plans.

The specific methods and means in Japanese teaching processes are generally similar with those in vocational education schools in China. They are mainly divided into two parts: theoretical teaching

and practical teaching, but they have some differences in their specific implementation. With the advantages in the percentage of the number of students and the number of facilities, students will have more operational opportunities and have longer operational time on average. In this way, the students can better master the actual operation. In this aspect, there are some problems in some of our vocational schools. It is mainly because there are many students but only a few facilities, which results in insufficient time for the students to operate the facilities. Of course, schools can try to maximize the students' actual operation opportunities and improve the students' practical abilities by way of "modular teaching" through teaching reform.

It is worth mentioning that professional schools in Japan take the acquisition of "graduate certificate + qualification certificate" as the ultimate teaching objective, and therefore, a large part of the teaching in the entire learning processes is the teaching of courses targeted at the national qualification certificate examination. If a student has passed the national examination before graduation, it means that the student gets the pass card for the employment.

Similar explorations and practices have appeared in China gradually. For instance, some schools have organized trainings for students to obtain relevant professional qualification certificates recognized by the state. However, in China, the professional qualification and job position is not in a completely one-to-one correspondence, and therefore, the professional qualification certificate can not directly become the pass card for the employment. But with the standardization of professional qualification in China, such non-correspondence relation will be gradually changed. In other words, although these certificate training and assessment can not be equal to the employment directly, they will be helpful to some extent in improving the students' ability and broadening the students' employment.

5. Teachers' quality

Excellent teaching faculty will create the core competitiveness of a school.

Japanese vocational education teachers integrate the teaching of theoretical courses and actual operations and raise high requirements on students. Vocational education students have to get more credits than students in ordinary specialties. For instance, vocational high school teachers are divided into two grades. Grade I certificate requires that the teachers must have obtained the master's degree or have studied for more than a year in a graduate school. Grade II certificate requires that the teachers must have obtained the bachelor's degree. Both the two certificates require the students to take educational subjects totaling 64 credits when studying in the school. The examination for the recruitment of teachers in Japan is held once a year, including first examination and second examination. First examination includes written examination, personality test, adaptability inspection and interview. To pass the second examination, the candidates need to pass: 1. Written examination, mainly to examine the candidates' professional knowledge on teaching profession. 2. Word writing, mainly to examine the candidates' standard writing of Chinese characters and their word writing ability. 3. Article writing, mainly to examine the candidates' improvisational article ability. 4. Practical skill testing, mainly to test the teachers' practical skills learnt from their professional courses.

Now, vocational education teachers in China mainly come from two sources, i.e. the normal universities and schools of education in regular comprehensive universities. However, due to the lack of appeal and poor enrollment of students in normal specialties, normal universities have begun to be devoted to non-normal specialties, and the proportion of non-normal specialties in many normal universities has exceeded that of normal specialties. We should give full play to the advantages of teachers in regular college and universities and strive to develop vocational and technical normal education. At present, there are only a few vocational and technical normal colleges in China, which is far from meeting the demands of vocational and technical education development. The provincial, municipal and regional authorities should designate a number of regular higher normal colleges and universities as the cultivation and training bases for vocational education teachers, establish vocational and technical normal colleges or establish the vocational education department, and

further set up relevant technical vocational education specialty for the cultivation and training of vocational education teachers. Science and technology colleges, agricultural colleges, medical colleges and other higher colleges can also set up vocational normal specialties and vocational (colleges or) universities can open up teachers' training classes according to their own characteristics to cultivate professional teachers for vocational technical education. [3]

6. Conclusion

Stones from other hills may serve to polish the jade of this one.

I am deeply impressed in this study, and through this conclusion report, I am able to comb my thoughts more clearly and have a better understanding. China is now in an important period for great reform and development of vocational education. Each vocational teacher should seize opportunities and greet the challenges through reform and development. Of course, we may encounter the restrictions of some objective factors during the reform, and no education mode adopted in any foreign countries can be directly applied. We need to pave a path of vocational education suitable for China's national conditions with Chinese characteristics.

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