

A Review and Reflection on the Cultivation of Normal Students' Vocational Skills in Local Normal Universities under the Background of Teacher Training Professional Certification*

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Professional certification for students of educational majors provides a crucial guideline for the cultivation of teachers. The cornerstone of development for local normal universities is to uphold the characteristics of teacher education and highlight the history and tradition of teacher education, because the level of teacher vocational skills of students in normal universities has a direct impact on faculty strength of basic education. Consequently, based on an analysis of necessity and feasibility of teacher vocational skill training for students in normal universities amid the professional certification for students of educational majors in a new era, four approaches are proposed in this article as follows: (1) upholding the characteristics of cultivation of students of educational majors while optimizing curriculum planning; (2) innovating training methods for better guiding capacity; (3) coordinating training management for guaranteed education quality; (4) improving performance evaluation mechanism for a training path towards an assessment system.

Keywords: professional certification, students of educational majors, vocational skills

The cultivation of talents through teacher education is to cultivate future teachers and prepare teachers for the future. As the minister of the Ministry of Education Chen Baosheng said on the 2020 national teacher's development conference, "teacher education should be greatly renovated so that more future outstanding teachers can be cultivated by current excellent talents". Therefore, it is of great significance for the mission of the cultivation for future teachers. Ever since the Ministry of Education issued the *Measures for the Implementation of Professional Certification for Students of Educational majors in Normal Universities (Provisional)* in 2017, professional certification for students of educational majors in normal universities has been formally implemented nationwide. With a greater access and larger scale, and slow improvement in the development of educational majors, professional certification for students of educational majors is conducive to

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the research on the reality of teacher education. In addition, the quality of teacher education can be enhanced as normal universities strengthen the awareness of educational commitment with a clear principle to follow.

As an application-oriented normal university funded by local government, Nanchang Normal University bears a mission to cultivate qualified teachers for basic education. The university has a long history of developing educational majors, with 60% of educational majors and 70% of students majoring in education. Exploring a scientific path towards teacher vocational skills training for students of educational majors is the essence of completing the reform of training model of teaching talents and fulfilling professional certification for students of educational majors.

I . Background of Vocational Skills Training for Students of Educational Majors in a New Era

The Measures for the Implementation of Professional Certification for Students of Educational majors in Normal Universities (Provisional) is the first classified professional certification initiative promulgated by the government of China, which clearly stipulates requirements for teachers in primary and secondary schools and kindergartens. According to the mandatory requirements of practicing teacher ethics and learning to teach, cultivate students and develop oneself (also known as “one practice and three studies”), teachers should grasp basic teaching skills and have preliminary teaching competence in the practice of education. In addition, teachers have to master the working rules and basic approaches for class organization and construction. In the work of collaboration and practice in education, teachers are requested to learn from an integrated system of teaching practice and a combined way of professional and educational practice. With an integration of educational internship, teaching practicing and educational study, teacher vocational skills of students of educational majors can be intentionally and significantly enhanced under the above-mentioned requirements that aim to cultivate teaching talents.

Since the nation-wide teacher certification examination held by the Ministry of Education of China in 2015, the country has faced several challenges in educational reform. The reasons for the challenges are as follows. The “privilege” of students of educational majors having a teacher certificate without taking the certification examination has been abolished, and the teacher certification examination is now more of a test for a teacher’s comprehensive capacities and vocational skills. Students of educational majors and non-students of educational majors have to compete with each other because of the removal of vocational barrier caused by their identical difference. In addition, previous lifelong teacher certification system has been broken by the new policy of teacher certification, which prompts normal universities to consider the cultivation of talents for a four-year education or a five-year development.

II . An Analysis of Necessity and Feasibility of Teacher Vocational Skills Training for Students of Educational Majors

Professional certification for students of educational majors is based on the concept of “student center, performance-orientation, and constant advancement”. Performance-orientation highlight the orientation of study performance of students of educational majors, and evaluate the cultivation quality of teaching talents in accordance with core capacity requirements of pedagogical graduates. The effect of vocational training for

students of educational majors will be examined on the spot with a professional certification which is conducted through professional self-evaluation, documentation verification, and on-site examination. The on-site examination is connected to students' competence of being a teacher in the future. Therefore, it is essential and imperative to strengthen vocational training for students of educational majors.

As the occupation of teacher is highly practice-oriented, qualified teachers are usually those who keep learning and growing in the frontline of education and teaching. Without vocational training, students of educational majors cannot acquire basic skills and capacities to gain an emotional experience of teaching career and a professional understanding of education and teaching. Without staying close to schools and student, learning from outstanding teachers, and getting into classrooms, students of educational majors cannot acquire constant experience and reflection, and thus they may not be a qualified teacher.

III. An Exploration of Problems in Teacher Vocational Skills Training for Students of Educational Majors

(1) Weakening Teacher Education and Its Characteristics

In order to implement the *Advices of the Chinese Government on Comprehensively Deepening of the Reform of Faculty Strength in a New Era*, the cultivation of students of educational majors has been upgrade to a higher level after the restructuring of the system of teacher education. Local normal universities strive for a transformation in development. Therefore, more focuses are given to the teaching of subjects and basic study of educational theories, whereas the persistence and innovation in teacher education and tradition are weakening because their efforts in promoting the strength and forging advantages of scientific research. Consequently, the shortage of enough attention to training and cultivation of vocational skills of students of educational majors has abated the development of students of educational majors in teaching capacity.

(2) Insufficient Faculty Strength and Imprecise Guidance

The number of teachers specializing in teacher education is inadequate, and such teachers often undertake many courses of teacher education without collective class planning. Therefore, the effect and quality of teaching cannot be guaranteed.

Furthermore, teachers rendering theoretical courses are short of teaching experience in basic education, and thus the in-class teaching and guidance are imprecise because of deficient combination of theory and practice. As a result, the training quality cannot be surely guaranteed due to dependence on students' self-directed practices, and thus the teaching and effect of teacher vocational skills for students of educational majors are hampered.

(3) Low-driven Motivation of Teaching and a Lack of Enthusiasm

According to an investigation, affected by factors such as family economic conditions, parents' expectations, professional interests and hobbies, future employment situation, etc., some students of educational majors are short of a clear self-cognition and professional positioning at the beginning of university life, and they have a low willingness to teach and a poor sense of professional identity. Accordingly, the students of educational majors cannot have a full command of teaching skills due to their unwillingness to participate in vocational skills training.

According to a 2019 survey of 1,608 senior students of educational majors in normal universities, these prospective teachers have a weak performance in “professional competence” among the three dimensions of professional quality.

Table 1

Statistical Table of Professional Quality of Prospective Teachers

Dimensions	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Questions	Mean of Each Question
Professional Quality	1608	212.4	36.807	55	3.86
Professional Concept&Teacher Ethics	1608	79.25	13.936	20	3.96
Professional Knowledge	1608	80.7	14.748	21	3.84
Professional Competence	1608	52.45	10.353	14	3.75
Valid N (List State)	1608				

(4) Inadequate Consideration of Systematic Curriculum Planning

On the one hand, local normal universities formed a discipline-centered professional structure due to the emphasis on discipline construction. The curriculum system of education majors is often identified according to the knowledge system of one discipline (or subject), and the essential and major part of the curriculum system is academic courses which mainly focus on the teaching of professional and theoretical knowledge. Therefore, vocational curriculums of teacher education are short of “statutory dominance in education”.

On the other hand, the curriculum of vocational skills training for students of educational majors is often unsystematic and not integrated as a comprehensive system to enhance vocational quality and professional competence of students of educational majors. As a result, the whole vocational skills training curriculum is just a simple combination of various skills without systematic and comprehensive effects.

(5) Imprecise Requirements and Incomplete Procedures of Evaluation

In current system of vocational evaluation for teachers, only the mandarin test is conducted in line with specific and strict requirements, whereas other vocational training courses are either incomplete in test requirements and contents, or aimless in specific practices. In a word, the evaluation system is not complete. In microteaching, for example, teacher evaluations are mostly based on their own experience and are highly random. Students' self-evaluation and mutual evaluation are more formal due to the lack of strict supervision and management. Hence, teachers and students have neither given effective teaching feedback nor can students' teaching evaluation and reflection ability be really cultivated. The procedural and generative assessment is often ignored in the evaluation, and a one-time and summative assessment method is often adopted. Therefore, it fails to establish a scientific and standardized assessment and evaluation mechanism and form an effective incentive effect. More importantly, it is difficult to fully mobilize students' enthusiasm for skill training.

IV. Vocational Skills Training Path for Students of Educational Majors in Normal Universities Under the Background of Professional Certification for Students of Educational Majors in a New Era

Based on the analysis of the background of the times and practical problems, the reality of the training of teacher professional skills of students of educational majors should be improved urgently, and the quality of the

training of professional teaching talents should be advanced immediately. Therefore, vocational training strategies for students of educational majors in normal universities are proposed as follows.

(1) Upholding the Characteristics of Cultivation of Students of Educational Majors While Optimizing Curriculum Planning

The characteristic of teacher education is the educational specialization and feature of normal universities, and it is the fundamental attribute distinguishing teacher education from other higher educations. Only by strengthening the characteristic of teacher education can local normal and universities maintain and highlight the education features and advantages. Therefore, highlighting the characteristic of teacher education in curriculum planning is a crucial approach for normal colleges and universities to transform education concept, uphold characteristic of teacher education, maintain the tradition of teacher education, and deepen teaching reform.

According to the 2019 survey of 1,608 senior students of educational majors in normal universities, the professional quality of prospective teachers is significantly correlated with the teacher education received in their universities. In addition, there is a significant correlation between the prospective teachers' professional concept and teacher ethics, professional knowledge and competence and the teacher education of their universities.

Table 2

A Correlation Analysis between the Prospective Teachers' Professional Quality and the Teacher Education of Their Universities

	Professional Quality	Professional Concept & Teacher Ethics	Professional Knowledge	Professional Competence
Pearson Correlation Coefficients	.438**	.424**	.405**	.408**
Significance (two-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
N Value	1608	1608	1608	1608
N Value	1608	1608	1608	1608

Therefore, the curriculum system should be further optimized in combination with professional certification standards. In the first place, the curriculum structure should be integrated and the proportion of general education and teacher education courses should be increased to set up new courses like "writing and communication" that focus on the improvement of comprehensive quality. In addition to courses of pedagogy and educational psychology, the curriculum for teacher education should incorporate new compulsory courses such as teacher ethics, teacher language skills, teacher calligraphy skills, and supervisor work and class management, etc. Optional courses like design for integrated practical activities, education and scientific research, and achievement development should also be conducted. Secondly, freshmen education and "freshmen seminars" should be conducted so that the students can have a clear understanding of the educational major, higher motivation to teach, and profound affection for education. Thirdly, a full-program practical education should be carried out by integrating vocational training throughout the whole process of teacher education, so as to build a comprehensive education practice content system including teacher ethics, teaching practice, class management, etc. Finally, the practical education should be progressed in a manner of overall

planning and staged implementation with the establishment of a three-level and three-dimensional skill training system of basic skill training, education internship, and teaching practice.

(2) Innovating Training Methods for Better Guiding Capacity

A two-teacher system for vocational skills training for students of educational majors should be applied. In this regard, a guiding model for teaching practice of students of educational majors should be constructed based on the collaboration of a teacher in college or university and a teacher working in the school of basic education. The two teachers should conduct a cooperative vocational skills training for students of educational majors by virtue of class teaching, skills training on campus, and competition activities. Meanwhile, more targeted and professional skills training content have to be organized in a categorized manner for the training of students of different majors. According to different features of physical and mental development of students in different grades, the practical education should be conducted in a hierarchical and progressive approach. Finally, new technologies such as cloud computing, big data, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence into vocational skills training of students of educational majors should be adopted in the practical education in line with new features of information technology (Ma, 2018, p. 12).

(3) Coordinating Training Management for Guaranteed Education Quality

Normal universities should innovate the management model and establish a management organization to employ the synergy of the cultivation of teachers, incorporate the curriculum planning into vocational skills training and make it a key part of the education content. appropriately, effective learning of vocational skills of students of educational majors can be ensured, and a learning process of coordinated development and mutual promotion can be shaped. At the same time, development space for students of educational majors should be provided through club activities, second-class practices, and skill competitions to promote a personalized development of vocational skills and to improve students' comprehensive quality with the combination of vocational skills training and practices.

In addition, a practice center for students of educational majors should be established so as to provide comprehensive practices of basic teaching skills and preliminary practices of outstanding teaching skills. A diversified practical space should be created with the integration of courses of the education of teacher ethics, presentation skills, recital and lecture skills, class management skills, microteaching skills, instruments-making skills, and calligraphy skills. Besides, normal universities should offer sufficient practicing opportunities and diversified practicing forms to effectively cultivate teaching skills of students of educational majors by means of making standards of vocational skill, organize practices and tests for vocational skills, and establish a resource database for vocational skills training.

(4) Improving Performance Evaluation Mechanism for a Training Path Towards an Assessment System.

Normal universities should uphold the outcome-based education (OBE) and conduct an examination for all students with an outcome of no one fails in the test. In this regard, a major-based assessment for teaching skills of students of educational majors should be organized according to cultivation targets and graduation requirements of each major, and the performance should be incorporated into GPA.

The evaluation system should cover indicators of theoretical education, microteaching, simulated class-teaching, teaching practice and internship. In addition, evaluation standards should be further established

after relevant evaluation indicators for each vocational skill are identified. Finally, a progressive system for the completion of each task for vocational skills should be designed. In addition, normal universities should monitor students' rate of reaching standards of teacher vocational skills by means of a registration for those who have passed the assessment for vocational skills, so as to strengthen the practice and assessment of teacher vocational skills training for students of educational majors.

Normal universities should hold teacher vocational skills competition for students of educational majors in a regular basis. With joint mobilization of the university and departments of relevant majors, specialized and distinctive competition activities should be designed to offer opportunities for performance and presentation to enhance students' enthusiasm to participate in practices. In teacher vocational skills competitions, teachers working in the frontline of primary and secondary schools, and kindergartens should be invited as judges so as to play their leading and instruction roles.

Conclusion

In summary, normal universities should promote the major construction, curriculum planning and personnel training with professional certification for majors of education, and construct the vocational skills training system for students of education majors. With the innovation and improvement of the path and method of vocational skills training for students of education majors, normal universities should integrate the vocational skills training through the whole process of teacher education and class teaching for students of educational majors, optimize personnel training, improve vocational skills, and cultivate qualified teachers for basic education.

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