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A Study on Process Orientation-Based Curriculum Development for Entrepreneurship Education in Vocational Colleges

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Abstract

Although the entrepreneurship education in vocational colleges is mushrooming, it is just like a castle in the air due to the lack of curriculum construction known as the fundamental carrier of entire entrepreneurship education, since curriculum construction is not accompanied by a systematic regime. By probing into the present status of entrepreneurship education in vocational colleges in China, this paper intends to build the curriculum system for entrepreneurship education in vocational colleges in respect of explicit curriculum and implicit curriculum based on the whole process of generalized entrepreneurship education.

Key words: Process orientation; Entrepreneurship education in vocational colleges; Curriculum development

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INTRODUCTION

Chinese vocational colleges are laying stress on competency, focusing on the enhancement of students' professional competence and highlighting practical teaching facilities the reinforcement and application of knowledge in practice, the improvement of practical

skills, and the employment or self-employment after graduation. By reason that the talent training objectives and modes of vocational colleges are badly similar to the implementation path of entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurship education should more preferably be vigorously promoted in vocational colleges. In order to solve the employment problem, a great many vocational colleges have actively carried out entrepreneurship education and made certain achievements since the mid-1990s. However, the lack of systematic curriculum system as a result of “blindly copying ready-made teaching materials and simulating the practical activities of institutions of higher education in the early stage” has constrained the effective promotion of entrepreneurship education in vocational colleges.

1. ANALYSIS OF PRESENT STATUS OF THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

1.1 Lack of Sophisticated Curriculum System

The model vocational colleges in China normally attach more importance to entrepreneurship education, and some of them are actively developing entrepreneurship-related education curricula. However, many vocational colleges failed to establish appropriate curriculum system suitable for the dimensional entrepreneurial knowledge, ability and quality structure since the newly developed system only comprises a small amount of additional entrepreneurship education content or fragmented electives, lectures and career guidance activities etc.; thus, it's impossible to integrate entrepreneurship education with the whole process of learning in college, so it's extremely difficult for students to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for entrepreneurship.

1.2 Shortage of Teacher Resources for Curriculum Development

Most vocational colleges have no independent entrepreneurial team of teachers, and the teachers are normally from the youth league, student affairs office and enrollment and employment office etc., which are usually engaged in complicated affairs. These teachers generally have educational background of ideological and political work, Chinese language and psychology etc., and have no systematic understanding of entrepreneurship education, having no time to make in-depth study on entrepreneurship education. From this point of view, it's almost a mission impossible for them to finish the development of entrepreneurship curriculum. A few vocational colleges have founded entrepreneurship education and guidance center and established dedicated teaching teams, which could benefit the teaching, research and curriculum development for entrepreneurship education.

1.3 Excessively Theorized Curriculum Developed

Some model vocational colleges have developed their own curricula. However, many students lack enthusiasm, because these excessively theorized, dogmatic and inflexible curricula that fail to take into account the practice. Moreover, the part-time teachers with extensive entrepreneurial experience and high theoretical quality are far from sufficient; the resultant faculty structure that "focuses on theory instead of practice" is exceedingly disadvantageous to foster students' entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial awareness (Chai, 2009). Additionally, since vocational colleges failed to provide further trainings for full-time teachers on entrepreneurship education, they merely have to book knowledge on entrepreneurship, but lack entrepreneurial passion and fail to teach based on adequate undertaking practice and practical cases. After the long periods of repetitive teaching, these full-time teachers from such a simplex source would inevitably turn entrepreneurship education lesson presentation into "useless boring texts", in which case the students would misunderstand the true meaning of entrepreneurship education, let alone encouraging them to start an undertaking and fostering their entrepreneurial confidence.

2. DEFINITION OF THE TYPES OF TWO-DIMENSIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION CURRICULUM

As a generalized concept, entrepreneurship education curriculum could be classified into explicit curriculum and implicit curriculum by its manifestation and action principle, and further divided into four modules, i.e. subject curriculum, activity curriculum, entrepreneurship practice curriculum and environmental curriculum by

the content and form. This paper intends to build an entrepreneurship education curriculum system based on these two dimensions. Relations between the two dimensions are shown in Figure 1.

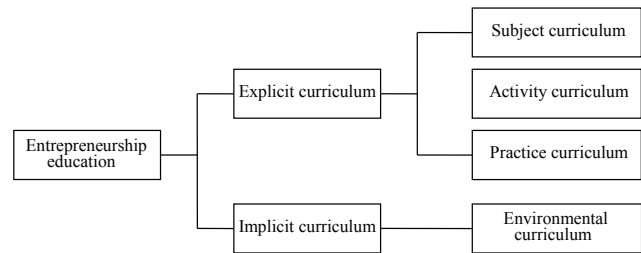


Figure 1
Two-Dimensional Structure Diagram

3. BUILD A PROCESS ORIENTATION-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

The following sections principally expatiate on the predominating path for the establishment of entrepreneurship education curriculum system in vocational colleges based on the entire process of entrepreneurship education curriculum from the perspective of explicit curriculum and implicit curriculum. The primary structural framework diagram is shown in Figure 1.

3.1 Path of Explicit Curriculum Development

As shown in Figure 1, the explicit curriculum for entrepreneurship education principally consists of subject curriculum, activity curriculum, and practice curriculum. Subject curriculum lays particular stress on theory impartment, and serves as the foundation of entrepreneurship education curriculum system. Generally, subject curriculum is developed to foster students' entrepreneurship awareness and enterprising spirit, and realize the learning integration for knowledge on marketing, business management, and financial management etc.. In Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology, the specialized core course for business management specialty covers entrepreneurship education, business management, marketing and financial management; this approach is conducive to fostering students' overall knowledge structure for student entrepreneurship, and thereby laying the foundation for future entrepreneurial path; the relatively flexible activity curriculum is designed to arouse the students' entrepreneurship awareness, emblaze their entrepreneurial enthusiasm, and develop psychological qualities of entrepreneurship through entrepreneurship forum, entrepreneurship lecture, video presentation, expert interview, field visit, and business planning competition organized by such student organizations as business

association, business club and business management association. Practice curriculum is a weak point of vocational colleges, but some outstanding vocational colleges normally address entrepreneurship practice issues in two ways, i.e. the entrepreneurship software based training simulation, and the pioneer park. For example, Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology uses a series of pioneering training software developed based on the joint efforts of college and enterprise to stimulate real-life environment, and enable the students to establish a sense of business risk and develop psychological quality for entrepreneurship; furthermore, this college incubates proven project at its pioneer park so as to broaden students' hands-on experience, which is irreplaceable by theory curriculum and activity curriculum. Based on the said three major types of curricula, the explicit curriculum for entrepreneurship education in vocational colleges emphasizes particularly on the development of practical abilities, for example, the theoretical practicality of subject curriculum, the project practicality of activity curriculum, and the manipulative ability of practical activity. On this account, more importance shall be attached to practice curriculum when designing explicit curriculum for entrepreneurship education. Based on the analysis of explicit curriculum's three constituent parts, the following measures shall be taken to give full play to the role of explicit curriculum in vocational colleges.

3.1.1 Expedite the Independent Development of Curriculum

Entrepreneurship education curriculum development is relatively slow in vocational colleges; too much emphasis is put on form during the development; inadequate stress has been placed on the integration with actual conditions of teachers & students, colleges and regional economy; the curricula developed are monotonous, and come short of features and highlights (Yin & Liu, 2011). Firstly, vocational colleges shall encourage full-time teachers for entrepreneurship education to prepare teaching materials for compulsory and elective courses based on actual teaching conditions so as to exhibit the unique features of vocational colleges through teaching materials; secondly, strive to prepare teaching materials with the local economic trends and discipline-specific entrepreneurial edges in mind so as to provide systematic theoretical knowledge for future entrepreneurial activities and show the development direction for specific entrepreneurial behavior; lastly, invite the experts with entrepreneurial experience in enterprises to curriculum development so as to enrich the knowledge of practice.

3.1.2 Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum Should Be Brought Under the Educational Management System of Vocational College

A great many vocational colleges are now seeing entrepreneurship education as a "vanity project", and

putting it under the system of student affairs office, enrollment & employment office or the committee of youth league; no professional guidance center, dedicated teacher resources or even special places of practice have been provided for entrepreneurship education, while the curriculum has not been brought under the college's overall personnel training program. Entrepreneurship education could be realized through compulsory and elective courses. Specific subjects of compulsory courses shall be arranged in the principle of "going from the easy to the difficult and complicated, and from basic to senior level"; in addition, discipline-specific required courses on entrepreneurship shall be set up based on disciplinary distinction. Elective courses shall cover abundant subjects and extensive content so that the students are allowed to select the subjects of interest or the suitable subjects to the greatest extent. In Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology, for example, the required courses for the School of Economics and Management cover entrepreneurship education, which is included in the elective courses for other departments or schools; moreover, entrepreneurship education is brought under the overall personnel training program. This practice is in line with reality and worth learning.

3.1.3 Enhance the Cross Linking of knowledge Structure of Curriculum

As a comprehensive curriculum based on cross linking of knowledge, entrepreneurship education curriculum covers the knowledge on marketing, business management and financial management. If these knowledge structures are properly linked up in an overall personnel training program, it would be possible to develop the students' sense of entrepreneurship and reinforce the entrepreneurial quality of teachers, which would help to create an entrepreneurial atmosphere in vocational colleges.

3.1.4 Enrich the Types of Entrepreneurial Activities, and Maintain the Diversity of Curriculum

When compared with traditional activity curriculum, such novel on-campus activity curricula as the establishment of entrepreneurship societies, entrepreneurship clubs, business management associations and marketing associations, as well as the actual on-campus business activities can attract more students interested in entrepreneurship to understand and get determined to start business, thus being conducive to the establishment of real entrepreneurial team in future. Furthermore, diversified activity curriculum is not only an important part of entrepreneurship education in vocational colleges, but is also an effective way to development vocational students' entrepreneurship quality.

3.1.5 Enhance the Proportion of Practice

Most social practical activities take the form of college-business cooperation. It's important to reinforce the cooperation with businesses now. Entrepreneurship

bases jointly founded by colleges and businesses provide students with a business practice platform, and serve as a “gauge” for determining their entrepreneurship capacity. Such combination of specialized practice and entrepreneurial practice contributes to a win-win pattern between students, colleges and businesses. This sort of entrepreneurship practice could be realized in many ways, e.g. traditional simulation training. Some vocational colleges where conditions permit have industrial centers built based on college-business cooperation or pioneer parks for project implementation. In others, students are sent to the businesses jointly founded by college and business to gain practical experience.

3.2 Path of Implicit Curriculum Development

The benign development of implicit curriculum for entrepreneurship education in vocational colleges is an important way to create a strong entrepreneurial atmosphere, while perfect entrepreneurial atmosphere would in turn facilitate the formation of an entrepreneurial culture in vocational colleges. No fully unified standard has been established at home and abroad for implicit curriculum of entrepreneurship, but implicit curriculum can imperceptibly influence the students. According to foreign and domestic research, implicit curriculum principally comprises three aspects, i.e. material aspect, institutional aspect, and the cultural aspect, which allow students to develop entrepreneurial awareness, foster entrepreneurship, and improve the entrepreneurial quality. Although the implicit curriculum for entrepreneurship education has attracted attention of some scholars, its building method is still in the stage of exploration due to the concealment of its action mechanism. This paper proposes corresponding building approaches based on the factor constitution of implicit curriculum so as to achieve the controllability and significance of implicit curriculum’s action result to whatever extent possible.

3.2.1 Enhance Financial Support, and Improve Infrastructures

Vocational colleges have failed to put sufficient investment in entrepreneurship education and infrastructure construction; for example, the financial input for entrepreneurship education curriculum, the investment in places of entrepreneurship activities, and the input for social practice for entrepreneurship are extremely insufficient; these inputs may bring about obvious effect on explicit curriculum and help the students to learn systematic theoretical knowledge and gather true entrepreneurial experience. For the purpose of entrepreneurial practice activities, the good ideas presented by students of entrepreneurship contest or some promising projects of businesses could be incubated at entrepreneurship bases built by colleges independently or in conjunction with businesses. This practice could help students gain entrepreneurial experience and enhance

the funding for entrepreneurship education in a flexible manner. Infrastructure construction could intensify vocational students’ recognition for entrepreneurial behavior, help to develop their entrepreneurial awareness and entrepreneurial psychological quality, and provide the necessary condition for their gathering entrepreneurial experience. For the support in this regard, businesses would play an indispensable role. For instance, Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology has built two industrial centers in conjunction with businesses, and independently established two venture incubators in addition to the entrepreneurship education guidance center and the activity space of entrepreneurship club. In this way, the students could experience the entire process (i.e. theory study → entrepreneurship activities → entrepreneurship practice → project implementation) on campus.

3.2.2 Vocational Colleges Shall Establish a Series of Incentive Systems Favorable to Entrepreneurship

Besides, vocational colleges shall develop specific rules of activities for the entrepreneurship education activity curriculum, thus enabling the students to abide by appropriate rules in activities. In addition, vocational colleges shall establish appropriate entrepreneurship incentive system to encourage the students to participate in entrepreneurship education curriculum and take part in entrepreneurship activities so that they would take pride in entrepreneurship. Since most entrepreneurship behaviors are organized by entrepreneurship groups, the establishment of on-campus entrepreneurship groups should be a necessary way to nurse the future entrepreneurship forces. Temporary entrepreneurship teams are normally established for traditional entrepreneurship planning contest lack psychological resistance to frustration necessary for long-term cooperation and the practical entrepreneurship ability due to the strong intentionality and theoretical property. Hence, entrepreneurship teams shall be constantly fostered in vocational colleges by gathering entrepreneurs who have the same goal through societies or associations etc., and by annealing entrepreneurship quality in entrepreneurship activities and practice. In Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology, for example, such sophisticated institutional documents as the *Measures for Management of the Initiation of Undergraduates’ Technological Innovation Projects at Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology*, the *Off-campus Competition Incentives for Undergraduates of Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology*, the *Measures for Management of Undergraduates’ On-campus Entrepreneurship at Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology (Trial)*, and the *Implementation Plan for Entrepreneurship Education at Nanjing Institute of Industry Technology* have been issued to provide institutional guarantee and long-acting mechanism for entrepreneurship education-related teaching activities and practice.

3.2.3 Campus Cultural Development Should Be Given the Top Priority When It Comes to the Implicit Curriculum for Entrepreneurship Education in Vocational Colleges

Firstly, it's advisable to intensify the promotion of entrepreneurship by means of broadcasting, blackboard newspaper and news bulletin etc., and thus implanting entrepreneurship culture into campus culture so as to encourage more students to start an undertaking; secondly, improve the entrepreneurship quality of both teachers and students, and create a harmonious teaching situation. In this way, it would be possible for the students to recognize entrepreneurship through the improvement of teachers' entrepreneurial quality, while the teachers would identify with the "student-centered" concept of teaching for entrepreneurship education curriculum, in which case the harmony between teachers and students

would be reinforced; lastly, it's advisable to enrich campus culture-related activities so as to address students' demand for entrepreneurship activities. For example, such cultural activities themed by entrepreneurship as on-campus literary evenings, knowledge contests, debate competitions, article soliciting contest, entrepreneurship forum as well as lectures on entrepreneurship psychological guidance, entrepreneurship ability test and entrepreneurship case analysis etc. could be organized to diversify campus culture, thus arousing vocational college students' group consciousness and sense of duty, helping them developing inspiring campus culture spirit with plentiful epochal features and "youth characteristics", and thereby developing their sense of entrepreneurship, improving their entrepreneurship quality, and ultimately realizing entrepreneurship education in vocational colleges in a liberal cultural environment.

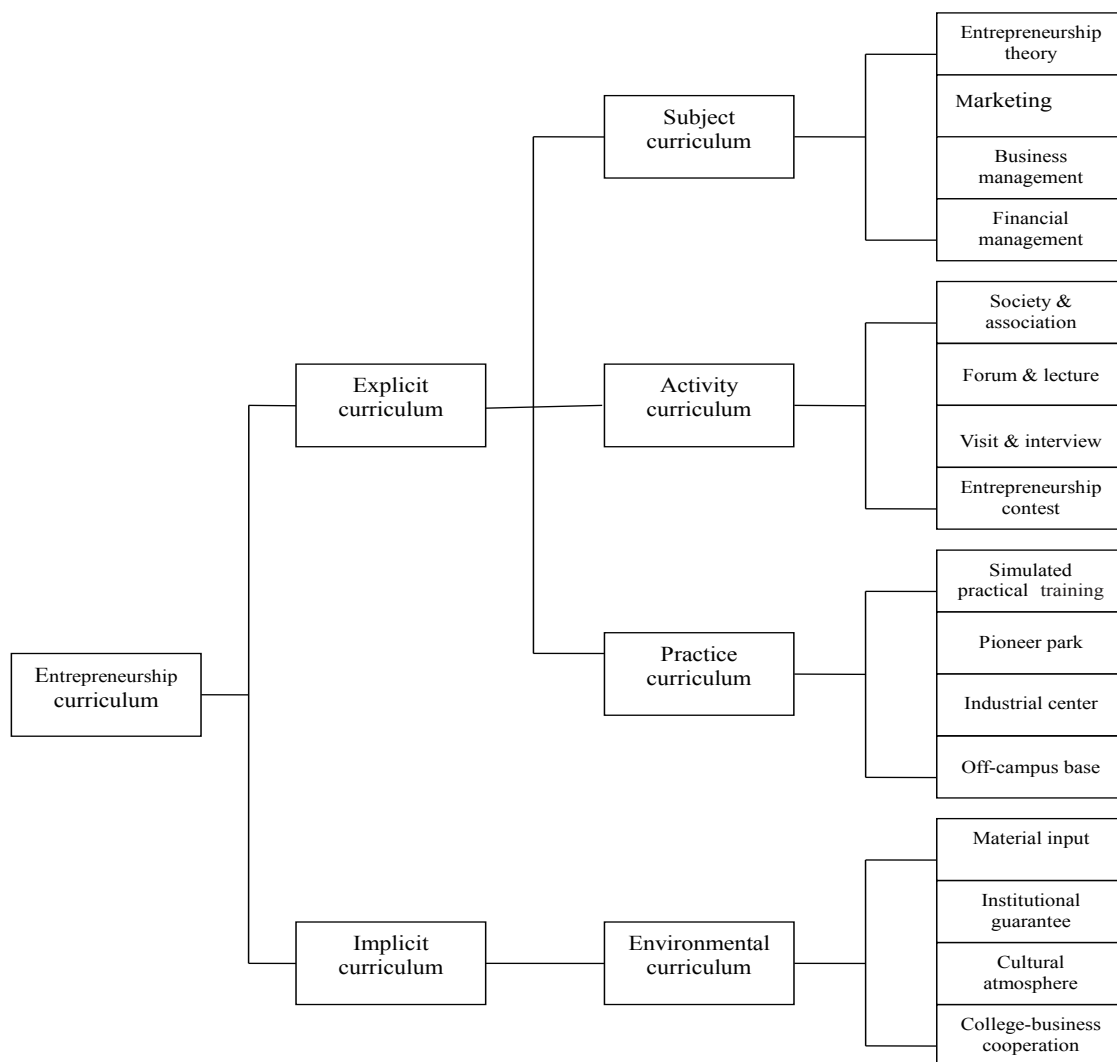


Figure 2
Path Diagram of Process Orientation-Based Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum Development

Figure 2 shows the general paths of entrepreneurship education curriculum development. It's essential to develop entrepreneurship education curriculum with discipline features, college's physical circumstances and local economic features so as to establish a suitable, featured and distinguished entrepreneurship education curriculum system acceptable by students.

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