

Innovation in Mechanisms for Enhancing Social Service Functions with High-Quality in Vocational Colleges

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Abstract: Innovation in mechanisms serves as the core driving force for vocational colleges to effectively fulfill their social service functions. This study identifies systemic challenges in their fulfilling social service function, including fragmented organizational management, inefficient resource allocation, biased evaluation incentives, and superficial collaboration. Furthermore, this paper proposes a comprehensive innovation of the social service mechanism of higher vocational colleges in a holistic and systematic way from five core dimensions, namely, guarantee mechanism, motivation mechanism, organizational mechanism, incentive mechanism and evaluation mechanism, so as to promote the high-quality performance of the social service function of higher vocational colleges.

Keywords: Higher Vocational Colleges; High-Quality Social Services; Mechanism Innovation

1. Introduction

Social service is one of the core functions of higher vocational colleges. As an important link between vocational education and economic and social development, the social service of higher vocational colleges not only concerns the effectiveness of technical and skilled talent cultivation but also serves as a key measure of their educational quality and social contribution [1]. In 2025, Ministry of Education of PRC launched the second phase of "the China Characteristic High-Level Vocational Colleges and Programs Construction Plan" explicitly designating the enhancement of social service capabilities as one of the core indicators for measuring the high-quality development of vocational education. With the in-depth implementation of the "National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan", higher vocational colleges have been entrusted with

greater social responsibilities. They must not only cultivate technical and skilled talents adapted to industrial development but also become an important force in serving regional economic and social development, promoting industrial upgrading, and driving technological innovation. Mechanism innovation is the key to achieving high-quality development in the social services of higher vocational colleges. In recent years, domestic scholars in China have focused on the issue of mechanism innovation in the social services of higher vocational colleges and conducted relevant research. He Wenjuan explored ways to build the social service mechanisms of higher vocational colleges and enhance service capabilities from several aspects, including social service management institutions, operational mechanisms, information sharing mechanisms, and incentive mechanisms [2]. Yang Xuesong et al. explored the advantages and constraints of universities in serving the local economy, studied relevant mechanisms suitable for universities to serve economic and social development, and proposed effective approaches for universities to serve the local economic and social development [3]. Cao Yuanfang et al. analyzed the problems existing in social service of Chinese vocational colleges and discussed the realization mechanisms for them to serve economic and social development [4]. Zhang Qingshan et al. proposed enhancing vocational colleges' social service evaluation mechanisms, incentive systems, enrollment protocols, and motivation mechanisms through internal institutional development [5]. This study systematically puts out policy, organizational, incentive, operational, and evaluation-driven institutional innovation strategies to advance fulfillment of high-quality social service in vocational colleges, which aims to enrich vocational education theory and practice, providing references for improving social service capabilities.

2. Mechanism Bottlenecks in High-Quality Social Services of Vocational Colleges

Under the background of high-quality development in vocational education in the new era, China's vocational colleges are expected to fulfill their social service functions with greater expectations. However, most vocational colleges currently face deep-seated mechanism barriers in carrying out these functions, which severely hinder the improvement of service quality and sustainable development [6].

2.1 Fragmented Organizational Management Mechanisms

Higher vocational colleges currently face widespread fragmentation in social service management, characterized by "multiple authorities and unclear responsibilities" [7]. Social service functions are often dispersed across departments such as the Academic Affairs Office, Continuing Education College, Scientific Research Office, School-Enterprise Cooperation Office, and secondary faculties, lacking a dedicated college-level coordinating body or authoritative mechanism, which results in inconsistent policies and standards that hinder collaborative service delivery. Project operations are predominantly temporary and task-oriented, lacking long-term planning and sustained follow-up. Service activities exhibit "fragmented" characteristics, making it difficult to establish brand effects or cumulative advantages. The loose organizational structure directly impacts service professionalism and response speed.

2.2 Inefficient Resource Allocation Mechanisms

The inefficiency in resource investment and utilization is another core systemic challenge. The social services lack stable and sufficient dedicated budgets, relying predominantly on competitive project funds with singular and unsustainable sources. This results in many high-quality initiatives being hindered from deepening or scaling up due to insufficient follow-up funding. In terms of material resources, expensive training equipment and laboratories experience high idle rates during non-teaching periods, while external entities are difficult to conveniently access these resources. On-campus resources also exhibit low levels of social openness. In terms of human resources, there is a shortage of "dual-qualified" teachers

capable of both theoretical instruction and practical service delivery, with existing faculty members requiring enhanced motivation and capability to engage in social services. More critically, resource allocation often follows the inertia of "supply-oriented" approaches, failing to precisely align with the dynamic demands of regional industries and community development. This leads to significant misalignment between resource allocation and actual social needs.

2.3 Deviation in Evaluation and Incentive Mechanisms

The absence of scientific evaluation and effective incentives has significantly weakened the intrinsic motivation of teachers and students to participate in social services [8]. In the teacher evaluation system, social service work is generally low weight, with vague evaluation criteria that often rely on simplistic quantification while neglecting qualitative indicators such as service quality, practical outcomes, and social impact. In critical processes, such as, promotion in professional title, performance distribution, social service contributions are far less valued than teaching and research achievements, leading teachers to commonly regard social service as "additional burdens" or "soft tasks." In institutional and team assessments, social service performance has not been effectively incorporated into core evaluation metrics for secondary departments or management units. Meanwhile, the specialized reward system for social services remains underdeveloped, with both spiritual and material incentives being insufficient to form effective positive guidance. Student's participation in social services has not been adequately linked to their credit recognition, employment recommendations, and other related processes.

2.4 Superficial Collaboration Mechanisms

The collaboration among schools and enterprises, schools and local governments, and inter-school partnerships often suffers from superficiality. School-enterprise cooperation typically remains at the level of signing agreements and establishing joint demonstration bases, lacking deep interest alignment and sustainable operational mechanisms based on joint technology R&D, product upgrades, and talent cultivation. The phenomenon of "schools being enthusiastic while enterprises remain indifferent" is particularly prominent. In school-local

collaborations, colleges often fail to adequately understand the real and dynamic needs of local governments and communities, resulting in service offerings that are poorly aligned with regional strategic planning and public welfare priorities. Inter-school collaborations frequently engage in low-level competition for student enrollment and resources due to homogenized academic programs. The blurred boundaries of rights, responsibilities, and interests among multiple stakeholders, coupled with information asymmetry and weak trust foundations, lead to high collaborative costs and hinder the establishment of a symbiotic and mutually beneficial social service ecosystem.

3. Innovation of Mechanism of High-quality Social Service in Higher Vocational Colleges

Innovation of mechanism of high quality social service in higher vocational colleges is a systematic project. This paper discusses the systematic innovation strategy of safeguard mechanism, organization mechanism, operation mechanism, incentive mechanism and evaluation mechanism, which provides mechanism guarantee for higher vocational colleges to perform the social service function of high quality.

3.1 Innovating Support Mechanisms

First, Strengthening Policy and Institutional Safeguards [9]. Actively seeking policy support from local governments in fiscal investment, tax incentives, project approval, and accelerating the implementation of the "finance + fiscal + land + credit" combined incentive mechanism. Clearly defining the responsibilities, rights, and interests of all parties involved in social service activities, particularly in intellectual property ownership, profit distribution from technology transfer, and risk sharing, providing clear legal basis. Establishing an arbitration mechanism for industry-education integration disputes to resolve controversies related to intellectual property and profit distribution during collaboration. Second, Enhancing Management System. Systematically revising or formulating regulations covering personnel, finance, research, teaching, asset management, and performance evaluation, developing social service management methods, achievement recognition protocols, and incentive policies to ensure the effective implementation of innovation mechanisms and avoid institutional conflicts.

Improving management methods for horizontal projects, clarifying project classification, approval standards, process management, funding usage details, completion requirements, and achievement ownership. Formulating regulations on intellectual property and technology transfer to clearly define the distinction between service inventions and non-service inventions, specifying profit distribution ratios among inventors, teams, departments, and schools, and significantly increasing the proportion of inventors/teams. Refining management methods for part-time work and social services of faculties, standardize approval procedures, clarifying rights and obligations, time guarantees, and conflict-of-interest avoidance mechanisms. Third, Establishing Diversified Funding Mechanisms. Schools should increase funding for social services by establishing a dedicated development fund, which include in the annual budget to support platform development, project incubation, resource integration, staff training, and recognition programs. The proportion of indirect costs should be substantially raised. Project teams should be permitted to allocate surplus funds for subsequent R&D or incentives. Funding channels should be diversified by actively seeking government special funds for industry-education integration, rural revitalization, and skill enhancement, while encouraging corporate donations. Enterprises investing in institutional social services should receive more tax deductions or refunds.

3.2 Innovating Organizational Mechanisms

Firstly, organizational restructuring should be implemented: At the college level, a "Industry-Education Integration and Social Services Committee" should be established with the president of college as chairperson. Members should include representatives from teaching, research, human resources, finance, asset management, secondary colleges, and industry experts. This committee will oversee top-level design, strategic planning, major policy review, resource coordination, performance evaluation, and cross-departmental coordination [10]. A dedicated Social Services Office in college should be established, independent of the Research Office and Academic Affairs Office, to manage policy implementation, project management, platform development, resource allocation, information dissemination, contract

review, performance data collection, external liaison, and quality monitoring. Secondary colleges should be granted greater autonomy in social service project negotiations, team formation, process management, and budget utilization, with enhanced flexibility in personnel, financial, and resource allocation. This encourages them to proactively align with industry needs and develop distinctive social services. Secondly, service platforms should be innovated: Establishing networked, cross-sector service platforms beyond traditional academic departments, such as industry colleges, municipal industry-education alliances, sector-specific industry-education integration communities, applied technology research institutes, and collaborative innovation centers. These platforms will integrate services into broader regional development frameworks and conduct joint research on specific technical challenges. Thirdly, the innovation of governance model: the establishment of a council system, the implementation of "statutory" management, and the promotion of professional operation teams, etc., to establish a governance model for high-quality social services in vocational colleges, which shifts from "administrative dominance" to "multi-stakeholder co-governance", ensuring scientific decision-making, efficient operation, and balanced interests.

3.3 Innovative Operational Mechanisms

First, Demand-Oriented Mechanism: Establishing an industry-driven operational framework to ensure social service content keeps pace with industrial development trends [11]. Creating a coordinated adjustment mechanism between academic disciplines and industrial structures, transforming industrial demands into teaching resources and service projects. Institutions collaborate with enterprises/community organizations to jointly design and develop a social service project repository, ensuring projects to solve real-world problems. Regularly organizing service teams led by academic leaders and core faculty members to conduct on-site technical diagnostics, skill enhancement surveys, and community service assessments in enterprises and communities. Second, Supply-Side Innovation: Focusing on technical challenges faced by regional medium-sized and small enterprises by providing in-depth services including technical

consultation, process optimization, product development, and technology transfer. Offering customized training programs, vocational education, skill enhancement courses, and continuing education based on job competency standards for enterprise employees, community members, and new-generation professional farmers. Providing services such as industrial planning, policy consultation, standard development, and industry reports for local governments and sectors. Precisely addressing rural needs through systematic support in industrial assistance, talent cultivation, rural governance, and cultural development. Third, Shared Resource Mechanism: Innovate collaborative platforms to facilitate knowledge sharing and resource integration. By integrating college resources including laboratories, training bases, libraries, technical patents, faculty expertise, as well as corporate production facilities, technical specialists, market channels, and real-world project cases to establish an open and shared resource repository. Encouraging corporate engineers and skilled technicians to actively participate in social service initiatives, while empowering academic faculty to enhance their service capabilities through hands-on experience in enterprises and problem-solving. Utilize digital platforms, big data, and VR/AR technologies to consolidate resources and expand service coverage.

3.4 Innovating Incentive Mechanisms

On the one hand, spiritual motivation should be strengthened. Vigorously promoting the values of higher vocational education serving national strategies, regional development, industrial upgrading, and community livelihoods, integrating service-oriented ethos into campus culture, teaching practices, and academic atmosphere. It should be widely published for exemplary social service cases and outstanding individuals. Colleges will systematically summarize, refine, and promote successful social service models and achievements to enhance their reputation and influence in regional industries and public perception. Honors such as the "Outstanding Contribution Award for Industry-Education Integration" "Gold Medal Technical Service Expert" and "Excellent Social Service Team" will be established to recognize exemplary practices in industry-education integration and social services. Teachers actively participating in social services will receive

priority support for advanced technical training, academic conferences, corporate internships, and overseas studies to enhance their service capabilities. A dedicated career advancement pathway for "social service-oriented" teachers will be established, with horizontal research projects, technology transfer, and community service achievements recognized as quantifiable evaluation indicators, appropriately increasing their weight. Outstanding social service achievements may serve as key criteria for academic title promotions. Teachers demonstrating remarkable social service performance will be prioritized for honors including Outstanding Educators, Teaching Masters, Technical Experts, and Model Workers. A student credit recognition and conversion system will be implemented, incorporating participation in technical services, community service, and corporate internships into academic credit evaluations.

On the other hand, material incentives should be improved. Clear and incentive-driven policies will be formulated for revenue distribution from horizontal projects, technology transfers, and training services. Significantly increasing the profit-sharing ratio for directly participating teachers/teams, with the retained portion of colleges primarily allocated to social service platform development, team growth, and incentive funds. Establishing dedicated funds from college retained social service revenues, government grants, and social donations to support new social service project incubation, recognize outstanding teams, encourage faculty-student innovation and entrepreneurship. Creating a "Social Service Innovation Fund" or "Industry-Education Integration Incentive Fund" to support project initiation, risk compensation, and rewards for exceptional individuals and teams. Supporting teachers in leading interdisciplinary service teams. Prioritizing potential and high-performing social service teams in laboratory access, equipment procurement, team formation, and teaching assistant allocation. Offering scholarships, innovation grants, and employment priority recommendations for students who deliver tangible social service outcomes. Exploring incubating outstanding social service projects into student entrepreneurship initiatives with providing comprehensive support including facilities, funding.

3.5 Innovating Evaluation Mechanisms

First, Establish Scientific Evaluation Standards [12]. Developing a systematic comprehensive evaluation system for high-quality social services in vocational colleges, covering multiple dimensions such as service contribution, user satisfaction, service quality, resource integration, social impact, innovation, and sustainability. Formulating differentiated evaluation criteria for different types of services including technical support, skills training, cultural heritage preservation, and policy advisory. Exploring an "equivalent substitution" mechanism, treating high-quality social service outcomes like major cross-disciplinary research projects, significant technology transfers, and influential training programs as equivalent to or superior to certain levels of academic research or teaching achievements. Using the achievement of social service objectives, the introduction of industrial resources, and the depth of school-enterprise collaboration as core evaluation indicators for secondary colleges and academic programs, directly linking them to resource allocation and development opportunities. Second, Establish a Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Mechanism. Involving multiple stakeholders including government authorities, industry associations, partner enterprises, service communities, and graduates in the evaluation process, with particular emphasis on user satisfaction feedback and third-party assessment reports. Entrusting major projects to independent evaluations conducted by industry associations or professional assessment agencies to enhance credibility. Closely linking social service evaluation results to resource allocation, program development, faculty performance evaluations, professional title promotions, and departmental excellence awards. Establishing a data-driven dynamic monitoring system by utilizing big data and AI technologies to conduct real-time monitoring, dynamic evaluation, and early warning interventions for the effectiveness of social services in higher vocational colleges. Developing an effective feedback mechanism to form a virtuous cycle of "evaluation-feedback-improvement" for promptly addressing issues and shortcomings in the service process, thereby continuously enhancing service quality and social satisfaction.

4. Conclusion

The vocational colleges are characterized by

their vocational orientation, regional focus, industry relevance, and practical nature. Their social service functions are more pronounced and prominent compared to conventional higher education institutions. The institutional innovation in social services of vocational colleges represents a profound self-revolution and systemic restructuring, which requires vocational colleges to fundamentally break free from traditional educational inertia and path, adopting more open approaches, collaborative mechanisms, and innovative models to deeply integrate into regional economic and social development processes. This paper systematically explores five dimensions—guarantee, organization, incentives, operation, and evaluation to advance the high-quality implementation of vocational colleges' social services. The goal is to establish a robust social service system featuring "strong guarantees, coordinated organization, smooth operation, incentive compatibility, and scientific evaluation" thereby achieving sustainable development of vocational education and social economic.

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