Promoting the Cultivation of Innovative Practice Ability of Full-time Professional Degree Students by Innovative Practice Competitions

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Abstract: The cultivation of professional degree graduate students is an important part of graduate education. Innovative practice competitions of postgraduates highlight the characteristics of professional degree postgraduates’ training, pay more attention to the competitions’ process, adhere to the requirements of both innovative ability and practical ability of professional degree postgraduates, and constantly deepen the reform of training mode; colleges and universities should play the promoting role of competitions in the cultivation of innovative practice ability of professional degree graduates, through the reform of postgraduates’ training program and curriculum, promoting the tutor guidance mechanism, setting up a tutor guidance team, and establishing a coordination mechanism among provincial, universities’ and departmental competitions.

Keywords: Innovative practice competitions; Postgraduate; Training quality; Innovative practice ability

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The full-time professional degree is a degree type relative to academic degree. Its training goal is to cultivate high-level application-oriented professionals who master the solid basic theory and broad professional knowledge in a professional (or occupational) field, have a strong ability to solve practical problems, be able to undertake professional technology or management work, and have a good professional quality. \[1\] According to the needs of social and economic development, strengthening the cultivation of innovative practice ability is the core of professional degree postgraduates’ training, which plays an important role in improving the quality of professional degree postgraduates’ training and providing high-level specialized talents for specific industries or occupations. Since 2017, the Academic Degree Committee of Jiangsu Province has carried out innovative practice compe-

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titions for professional degree graduates in Jiangsu Province, and explored the mechanism to improve the innovative practice ability of professional degree graduates.

1. The Background of Innovative Practice Competitions of Postgraduates

Since 2009, China has started to recruit full-time professional degree postgraduates. By 2017, the enrollment of professional degree postgraduates exceeded that of academic postgraduates for the first time, and by 2018, the enrollment of professional masters accounted for nearly 58%. According to the 13th Five Year Plan for the Development of Degree and Postgraduate Education, by 2020, “the proportion of professional degree postgraduates will reach about 60%”[1]. It means that the professional degree postgraduate education has occupied half of the postgraduate education, and has became an indispensable part of the postgraduate education. How to further highlight the characteristics of professional postgraduates’ training has become an unavoidable practical issue in postgraduate education and management.

The Opinions on Deepening the Education Reform of Postgraduates clearly requires that the cultivation of professional degree postgraduates in colleges and universities should be guided by the promotion of professional ability, oriented to specific occupational fields, cultivate comprehensive quality suitable for professional posts, form a training mode of industry-university-research cooperation, strengthen the construction of practice base, and enhance the cultivation of practical ability and entrepreneurial ability of professional degree postgraduates. The Opinions on Further Promoting the Reform of the Training Mode of Professional Degree Postgraduates further points out that the training of professional degree postgraduates should be guided by occupational needs, focus on practical ability, and take industry-university-research cooperation as a way, establish a training mode of professional degree postgraduates which fits in economic and social development and with Chinese characteristics.

However, due to the influence of the training mode of academic degree postgraduates, the training of professional degree postgraduates in China is similar to that of academic degree postgraduates in the training mode, curriculum and management mode, and shows the tendency of “academic”[1][2]. The training mode of academic graduate students is basically used in the training of professional degree postgraduates, which has obvious academic tendency and fails to highlight the needs of different types of personnel training. At present, the training programs of
professional degree postgraduates in quite a few of colleges and universities are mostly adjusted on the base of the training programs of academic postgraduate education, adding experimental practice courses, or modules some experimental practice to basic theory courses. The training lacks occupational orientation, and the training of professional ability is insufficient. Therefore, the value orientation and education rules of professional degree postgraduate education cannot be carried out at the top level design. It is difficult to achieve the purpose and effect of practical teaching.

In addition, the lack of attention to the training of innovative practice ability of professional degree postgraduates is highlighted in the fact that the proportion of theoretical courses of professional degree postgraduates is larger than that of practical courses, and most of them replace social practice with subject research. The construction of various practical platforms lags behind, and the “double tutor system” has not been fully and effectively implemented. The participation of professional degree postgraduates in industry practice is significantly insufficient. The survey shows that more than half of postgraduates have not participated in or participated in industry practice for less than 6 months;[1] What more serious is that the professional degree postgraduates lack awareness of the cultivatable practice ability, and most of them are unwilling to participate in professional practice. At present, colleges and universities have also actively cooperated with all sectors of society to build all kinds of graduate workstations as the base of graduate practice. However, some colleges and universities pay little attention to the long-term operation of the base and lack professional guidance and a clear power-responsibility distribution system, leading to the practice of the base in a mere formality, and lack of attention to the practical training required by graduate students, especially professional degree graduate students.

2. The Current Situation of Innovative Practice Competitions of Postgraduates in Jiangsu Province

In 2017, the Academic Degree Committee of Jiangsu Province launched innovative practice competitions for postgraduates in Jiangsu Province, mainly including: ① the practice innovation ability competition for Education Masters; ② the MBA case competition; ③ the English translation competition for Postgraduates; ④ the law case competition for Postgraduates. By 2019, postgraduates’ innovative practice competitions were expanded to 14 events. The remaining 10 events are: innovative economic development competition, mathematical modeling competition, green ocean competition, energy saving and low carbon competition,
UAV competition, advanced materials competition, airport planning and design competition, smart agriculture competition, medical micro imaging competition, master of design / Art “canal · vision” “Poster design competition. So far, the innovative practice competitions of postgraduates in Jiangsu Province cover philosophy, law, history, economics, education, literature, science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, management, art and other disciplines. The influence of innovative practice competitions of postgraduates in Jiangsu Province on universities and postgraduates is increasing year by year. From the first few universities with more than 100 postgraduates participating in the competitions, it has expanded to the relevant training units of postgraduates participating in the competitions, and even attracted some postgraduates in Liaoning Province to participate in the competitions.

Based on the cultivation of innovative practice talents, the innovative practice competitions of Postgraduates in Jiangsu Province is gradually changing from simple competitions to the innovation of discipline construction, curriculum reform, scientific research and training mode. Through the practice of scientific research innovation, the competitions aim at cultivating talents with high-level innovative and practical ability, training postgraduates’ ability of finding-analyzing-solving problems, guiding postgraduates to pay attention to social practical problems, improve postgraduates’ ability of serving the national society with the knowledge and skills learned, cultivate postgraduates’ innovative spirit, scientific research level and practical ability, and then deepen the connotative development of graduate education, explore and promote the comprehensive reform of professional degree graduate education, and improve the quality of professional degree postgraduates’ training.

3. The Significance of Carrying out Innovative Practice Competitions to the Training of Professional Degree Graduate Students

(I) Innovative practice competitions deepen the reform of training mode, and highlight the characteristics of professional degree postgraduates’ training

The development of innovative practice competitions is greatly significant to the cultivation of high-level innovative and practical talents, the promotion of the reform of professional degree postgraduates’ training mode and the improvement of talent training quality. Through carrying out innovative practice competitions of postgraduates, participation of graduate students of related disciplines, guidance of tutors and comments of industrial enterprises, around the key aspect and core field of high-level innovative and practical ability personnel training, extensive experi-
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ence exchange and in-depth problem diagnosis, clarify the key points, approaches and strategies of professional degree graduate innovative ability and practical ability construction, comprehensively improve the training mode of professional degree postgraduates and the training quality and level of relevant types of postgraduates.

As an important starting point for deepening the comprehensive education reform of postgraduates, the contents of innovative practice competitions are mostly practical problems of the national social and economic development, often involving multiple interdisciplinary subjects, rather than a single subject. The development of competitions, on the one hand, can promote the reform of a series of discipline training system and curriculum content related to the competitions. On the other hand, it can guide postgraduates’ training unit and actively serve national strategies and regional development. In the process of guiding graduate students to participate in competitions, tutors find problems, deepens training concepts, adjust training contents, and improve scientific research and teaching methods, so as to achieve the effect of “promoting teaching and reform by competitions”.

(2) Although innovative practice competitions focus on results, they pay more attention to the training process, and the stimulation of the enthusiasm for innovative practice of professional degree graduate students

General competitions focus on results, while innovative practice competitions not only lay emphasis on training objectives and competitions’ results, but more on activities’ process, which is an innovative practice activity aiming at attracting more graduate students to participate and achieve training objectives through competitions. Innovative practice competitions can test the practice links through comprehensive questions, and can give directly feedback on the training effect and the cultivation of innovative practice ability of postgraduates through the processes and results of competitions, highlighting the characteristics of “focusing on results and more on processes”.

On the one hand, colleges and universities are required to carry out school trials. Through extensive in school trials, not only the influence of competitions is expanded, but also the enthusiasm of graduate students is mobilized, and the coverage of the competitions is expanded. On the other hand, colleges and universities are urged to combine competitions and talent training organically, so as to deepen into discipline construction and scientific research, and adhere to coordination between talent training, discipline construction and scientific research, the competitions management mechanism, rules and regulations of schools and colleges shall be established, and the tutor guidance team shall be established to create a good
competition atmosphere when they organize provincial competitions. Moreover, the reward and commendation mechanism shall be fully employed in innovative practice competitions, i.e., typical schemes, experiences, designs and works emerging in competitions can be compiled into volumes, widely publicized, and excellent competitors can be recommend to enterprises, stimulate graduate students’ enthusiasm for learning, research and innovation, and promote them to learn through competitions’ process, and compete through learning’s process, so that they can apply what they have learned and their learning can be used.

(3) Innovative practice competitions insist on the requirement of innovative ability and practical ability of professional degree graduate students

Innovative practice competitions insist on cultivating the innovative ability of postgraduates as the core, promoting learning by competitions, taking hot issues of social reality as topics, guiding the innovative practice direction of postgraduates, which is greatly helpful to improve and train the innovative spirit and practical ability of postgraduates.

Competitions’ topics are mainly from social hot topics, such as “mobile phone”, “big class”, “the two-child policy”, “Internet plus”, “bullying”, “half past three problem of primary school” and “characteristic town construction”, intentionally injuring people and causing traffic accidents and other real issues from judicial practice, as well as topics of high-tech information technology such as UAV, intelligent agriculture, advanced materials, etc.. Innovative practice competitions always emphasize that graduate students use their knowledge to creatively carry out case and topic studies in combination with social reality. Competitions highlight the combination of theory and practice and the combination of learning, scientific research and innovation practice, encourage graduate students to participate in the competitions in teams, guide graduate students to use professional knowledge to analyze and solve social practical problems and different disciplines. Competitions intend to realize the training of graduate students’ comprehensive abilities in academic research, innovative practice, exchange and learning, and to strengthen the guidance and training of graduate students’ awareness of problems, innovative ability and research methods.

Innovative practice competitions lay stress on the cultivation of practical ability of professional degree graduates. Competitions specially emphasize the investigation of the practical and occupational ability of professional degree postgraduates, such as “teaching skills of the Master of Education”, “writing ability of the Master of Law”, “case writing and analysis ability of the Master of Public Management”, “field investigation ability of the Master of Business Administration”, “interpreta-
tion’s and translation’s ability of the Master of Translation”, “design ability of the Master of Art”, and so on. They guide the graduate students to understand the social and economic development in depth, lead them to form research reports, design schemes, system design, software production, etc., strengthen the practical ability of the graduate students after conducting in-depth research, and play a guiding role for them to step into relevant industries and carry out relevant researches in the future.

Innovative practice competitions not only examine the basic knowledge of different disciplines, but also test the practical ability and occupational ability of professional degree postgraduates, which embodies the equal requirements of academic and professional degree postgraduates. They should pay attention to the “high academic” requirements of the cultivation of the professional degree postgraduates, and consider the investigation and exercise of the “high-level” practical ability, guide the training units to strengthen training of core literacy of professional degree postgraduates, such as their innovative ability and practical ability, improve the training unit to establish a professional degree postgraduates’ training mode oriented to improving professional ability.

4. Colleges and Universities Play the Promoting Role of Competitions in the Cultivation of Innovative Practice Ability of Professional Degree Graduates

At present, colleges and universities generally regard graduate students’ participation in the competitions as one of the indicators of college evaluation and graduate students’ excellence evaluation. In addition, many employers also focus on graduate students’ awards in competitions when they recruit employees, especially the awards in competitions at or above the provincial-level, which results in a high enthusiasm for graduate students to take part in the competitions. However, less than a third of graduate students can actually participate in project submission. With a little investigation and analysis, it is not difficult to find out that: due to the general lack of relevant experimental venues and funds for competitions, the disapproval of graduate students’ tutors, and the difficulty in selecting topics, etc., there are many graduate applicants but few participants. Besides, all kinds of national and provincial competitions have been carried out in full swing, but the publicity effect on postgraduates in colleges and universities is still limited. Since innovative practice competitions are important to the cultivation of innovative practice ability of professional degree graduates, colleges and universities should take following measures.
(1) In order to promote the reform of the training program and curriculum of professional degree postgraduates, it is necessary to take the participation of postgraduates in innovative practice competitions as a compulsory part of postgraduates’ training, support postgraduates to participate in cutting-edge, innovative and high-level scientific research and innovative work, encourage postgraduates to apply for and participate in high-level scientific research projects, and to independently carry out innovative scientific research projects or social practice survey and so on. In this way, we hope to further improve the role of scientific research projects in postgraduates’ training, and improve the quality of academic research in scientific research projects.

(2) Colleges and universities should promote the mentoring mechanism and build a mentoring team. The guidance for graduate students to participate in the competitions can be calculated as the workload of tutors, and the competition results can be taken as a part of the tutor’s teaching and scientific research results, and major achievements can be included in the tutors’ post appointment, title evaluation, performance evaluation and other activities. Moreover, the achievements of graduate students’ participation in innovative practice competitions are included in the performance appraisal of their colleges’ work, so that the enthusiasm of the colleges in organizing graduate students to participate in innovative practice competitions is fully aroused.

(3) Colleges and universities should establish a coordination mechanism among provincial, universities’ and departmental competitions, and actively promote competitions in schools.

The purpose of competitions is to cultivate the innovative ability and practical ability of postgraduates, so colleges and universities should ensure the participation opportunities of their postgraduates. However, due to the cost of national and provincial competitions, colleges and universities can adopt the pyramid model, that is, to carry out school-level competitions extensively and select excellent teams to participate in those. Colleges and universities can entrust the corresponding colleges to undertake the competitions within their scope through cooperation with competent departments. They should cooperate with multiple departments to integrate resources within the university in terms of the venues, instruments and equipment required for the competitions, promote the development of graduate students’ innovative practice competitions, and create a strong atmosphere for scientific research and innovative practice. Colleges and universities should set up corresponding policies to encourage graduate students to participate in all kinds of these competitions. By participating in school-level competitions, not only the innovative
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ability and practical ability of graduate students are cultivated, but also the enthusiasm of graduate students to participate in competitions is improved. What’s more, the coverage of competitions is further expanded.

In conclusion, innovative practice competitions of graduate students are in line with the current adjustment of graduate education structure in China, and has become an important carrier and way to cultivate the practical ability of professional degree graduate students. Taking postgraduates’ innovative practice competitions as an opportunity to cultivate the practical ability of graduate students can make them pay equal attention to both theory and practice, encourage them to learn professional knowledge passively and actively, and improve their ability to solve practical problems. Secondly, the training mode with postgraduates’ innovative practice competitions as the starting point not only inspects the education quality of professional degree graduate students, but also tests and exercises the practical ability of graduate students, and promotes our beneficial exploration in talent training and teaching reform.

Works Cited


