A Review of Practical Application Research on Labor Education in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract: This paper reviews the four core research directions in domestic vocational higher education labor education studies in recent years. From four dimensions — model construction, integration of labor education with professional education, cultivation of labor values, and the functional role of internship and practical training platforms — it summarizes the existing consensus and progress in this field. The study also identifies persistent challenges, including insufficient adaptability, a lack of replicable paradigms, difficulties in effectively implementing value guidance, and inadequate school-enterprise collaborative mechanisms, and finally proposes future research directions.
***Keywords*:** vocational colleges, labor education, high-quality development

1. Introduction

Labor education constitutes a core component of a comprehensive educational system and serves as a pivotal mechanism for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, as well as for cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents in the new era. At present, vocational colleges in China have achieved phased progress in labor education; however, they still face multiple practical challenges: some institutions exhibit superficial implementation practices, constraints in time and space, a disconnect between theory and practice, simplistic evaluation mechanisms, low student engagement, outdated curricular content, and inadequate alignment with labor market demands. Concurrently, under the influence of diverse negative ideological trends, existing labor education programs have yet to fully embody the distinctive characteristics of vocational education.

Meanwhile, the *Opinions on Promoting the High-Quality Development of Modern Vocational Education*, jointly issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, propose to "effectively enhance the adaptability of vocational education, accelerate the establishment of a modern vocational education system, build a skilled society, and uphold the craftsman spirit," while explicitly outlining requirements such as "upholding the principle of fostering virtue through education and integrating moral character with professional skills." Against the backdrop of educational digital transformation, the deepening of the "five-dimensional education" philosophy, and the construction of a "three-dimensional education" framework, these guidelines pose practical demands for vocational colleges to redefine the connotation, innovate pedagogical models, and restructure practical systems of labor education [1]. Currently, both academic and practical circles have witnessed diverse explorations, including SPOC-based blended teaching, integration of intangible cultural heritage resources, development of life-oriented practical activities, enhancement of internship and practical training programs, and integration of labor education with professional education, aesthetic education, and social practice.

Building on this foundation, this paper aims to systematically review recent domestic research on labor education in higher vocational colleges — covering dimensions such as model construction, value assessment, practical implementation pathways, and innovative mechanisms — while analyzing its current developmental status, existing challenges, and underlying evolutionary logic. This endeavor seeks to provide theoretical support and practical references for refining the labor education framework and enhancing the effectiveness of talent cultivation.

2. Construction and Theoretical Innovation of Labor Education Models

In the context of higher vocational colleges — a pivotal arena for cultivating skilled talents in the new era — establishing a scientific, systematic, and well-aligned labor education model that suits the educational positioning of higher vocational institutions constitutes a critical component in fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and realizing the educational value of labor education. In response to the new demands posed by economic and social transformation and upgrading for high-quality technical and skilled talents, traditional, monolithic approaches to imparting labor skills — both in content and methodology — no longer align with the objectives of the "Five-Dimensional Education" framework. There

is an urgent need to break away from the existing paradigm that prioritizes technical skills while neglecting overall literacy, systematically reconstruct the implementation framework of labor education from a theoretical standpoint, and explore localized labor education models that embody the distinctive characteristics of vocational education and align with the developmental patterns of higher vocational students. The primary objective of current explorations in this field is to address prevalent challenges in higher vocational labor education — such as homogeneous content provision and formalistic activity implementation — thereby leveraging theoretical innovation to provide a clear guiding framework for practical application.

Deng Jing (2025), from the core perspective of the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, systematically analyzed the current overall development status and educational significance of labor education in China's higher vocational colleges [2]. Her study demonstrates that labor education holds irreplaceable and unique value within the vocational education system; it serves as a crucial vehicle for cultivating the "craftsman spirit" and as a cornerstone for the development of technical and skilled talents. For instance, a survey conducted by Zhejiang Textile and Apparel Vocational and Technical College revealed that students who received systematic labor education produced 2.3 times more innovative works than those who did not, thereby fully substantiating the significant efficacy of labor education in fostering students' capabilities. However, the implementation of labor education in higher vocational colleges currently faces structural challenges. In response to these challenges, Deng Jing proposed a strategic framework comprising: strengthening foundational theoretical instruction on labor, systematically cultivating students 'correct conceptions of labor, and diversifying practical activity platforms through tiered and categorized approaches — thereby providing theoretical support for subsequent research and practice. Building upon existing scholarship, Weng Xiaobin and Tian Linshuang (2025) innovatively proposed a localized labor education model termed "Cultural Immersion and Four-Dimensional Enhancement," which emphasizes the integration of labor culture and tiered cultivation of students' labor literacy. This model elucidates the implementation process of labor education in higher vocational education and offers a new research pathway for achieving high-quality development of labor education in such institutions [3]. Furthermore, Shen Xiaoting (2024), using a case study of a higher vocational college in City J, explored a "life-oriented" practical shift in labor education within higher vocational education. The study constructed a three-dimensional implementation framework — encompassing career development, daily family life, and on-campus learning — thereby establishing mechanisms for fostering students' autonomous labor capabilities and identity recognition driven by endogenous developmental forces [4].

In summary, current academic research has shifted from the traditional approach of organizing isolated labor activities to the construction of systematic educational models for labor education. Existing research findings generally emphasize the deep integration of labor culture, daily life, and foundational theories within labor education; however, the suitability of these diverse models across various institutional contexts — characterized by distinct educational orientations and disciplinary structures — still requires further practical validation and optimization.

3. Pathways for Integrating Labor Education with Professional Education and Curriculum Design

As a distinct type of higher vocational education dedicated to cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents, its core characteristic is its specialized vocational orientation; this, in turn, dictates that labor education within higher vocational institutions must be closely aligned with the development of professional competencies. Consequently, facilitating the comprehensive integration of labor education into the entire talent cultivation process of professional education — thereby overcoming the disconnect between the two — constitutes the pivotal objective for enhancing the educational effectiveness of labor education in higher vocational institutions.

This integrated approach has already yielded remarkable results in practical implementation. For instance, Zhejiang Communications Vocational and Technical College has established a three-dimensional collaborative labor education system characterized by "cross-cutting integration across all educational stages, coverage of multiple domains, and dual core support mechanisms," achieving a virtuous cycle of enhancing technical skills through labor and advancing labor practices through technical expertise via its "one major, one distinctive feature" strategy. Similarly, the e-commerce specialty cluster at Chongqing Construction Engineering Vocational College has adopted a "Labor + E-commerce" curriculum framework to construct a tiered objective system, thereby fostering simultaneous advancement in both labor literacy and professional competence. Furthermore, the elderly care specialty cluster at Chongqing Urban Management Vocational College, guided by Party building initiatives, has deeply integrated its disciplinary strengths with labor-based education; consequently, its graduates have consistently maintained a high employment rate, and these best practices have been replicated across numerous other institutions. These experiences demonstrate that the deep integration of labor education and specialized education is not only an effective solution to the challenge of "disconnection between labor and academic training," but also

a pivotal measure for cultivating high-quality technical and skilled professionals.

This sub-theme focuses on breaking down the disciplinary barriers between labor education and professional education, thereby enabling the simultaneous advancement of students' labor literacy and professional skill development. By leveraging digital technologies or tailored curriculum frameworks, it aims to optimize the instructional structure of labor education and enhance the alignment between its teaching content and professional training objectives. Xu Jing (2022) noted that in current higher vocational education, labor education is frequently overshadowed by professional education, and its teaching content often fails to keep pace with industry development demands. She advocated for optimizing talent cultivation programs, reforming curriculum systems, and refining evaluation mechanisms to achieve deep integration between labor education and professional education [5].

In the dimension of innovative course design, Ding Rui (2022) introduced the SPOC blended teaching model into vocational college labor education, overcoming the spatiotemporal constraints of traditional classrooms. The teaching content was restructured into three modules — theoretical knowledge, practical training, and value cultivation — and a phased implementation plan along with a comprehensive evaluation system covering the entire process — from instructional preparation to classroom implementation and post-class extension — was developed. This approach effectively addressed the limitations of traditional teaching in terms of time and space, as well as the issues of singular evaluation agents and narrow evaluation dimensions [6].

Furthermore, Jin Xinyi and Tang Linna (2025), using art design majors as their sample, explored pathways for integrating labor education and aesthetic education within a professional academic context. They proposed a task-driven, "chain" -structured professional course practice model, embedding the cultivation of labor literacy into all phases of professional course practice, thereby addressing the practical challenges of inefficient utilization of educational resources and imbalanced educational objectives in such integration efforts [7].

Overall, existing research has widely reached an academic consensus on the necessity of "integration of specialized and routine work," and several representative explorations have also emerged in practical settings. However, there remain significant differences in appropriate implementation strategies across diverse professional backgrounds, and a standardized paradigm for "integration of specialized and routine work" that can be replicated and scaled across professions still requires further exploration.

4. Cultivation of Work Values and Exploration of Cultural Connotations

Labor values, serving as the cornerstone of labor education, fundamentally determine the developmental direction and qualitative shaping of the worldview and outlook on life of vocational college students, while also directly influencing the ultimate educational outcomes achieved through labor education in vocational institutions. In the new era, China's vocational education has entered a new phase of specialized development. A key challenge in current research on vocational labor education is how to leverage systematic labor education in vocational colleges to foster the spirit of model workers — characterized by dedication to one's post — and the craftsman spirit of pursuing excellence, while integrating China's outstanding traditional culture with regional cultural resources to provide systematic value guidance.

Guan Guixiang (2023) pointed out that promoting a distinctive labor ethos is an inherent requirement for cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents who meet the demands of the new era. He proposed advancing the cultivation of labor values from multiple dimensions: establishing a cultivation framework by refining a tiered and interconnected labor education curriculum system; conducting regular daily labor practices to enrich students 'labor experiences; and fostering a distinctive campus labor culture to create a robust educational environment — ultimately achieving systematic cultivation of students' correct labor values [8]. Based on a stratified sampling survey of five higher vocational colleges in Hubei Province, Jia Jialin (2022) found that current students in higher vocational education generally exhibit weak identification with correct labor values and insufficient depth of understanding regarding the educational value of labor. The survey further indicated that students possess limited awareness of labor education, the concept of "labor is glorious" is not widely embraced, and labor education in higher vocational colleges has not fully reflected the distinctive characteristics of vocational education. In response to these issues, Jia Jialin emphasized that the cultivation of labor values in higher vocational education must highlight the inherent nature of vocational education; this can be achieved by innovating labor education practice models to enhance the effectiveness of fostering the "unity of knowledge and action," complemented by the establishment of a robust labor education assessment and evaluation system to stimulate intrinsic motivation [9].

In the research dimension of developing and utilizing regional distinctive cultural resources, Tan Qingming et al. (2025), drawing on embodied cognition theory, conducted an in-depth exploration of the distinctive labor skills and labor cultural resources embedded within Guangxi's intangible cultural heritage. They elucidated the unique educational value

of such intangible cultural heritage resources in vocational college labor education, and proposed concrete implementation pathways for integrating these labor-related intangible cultural heritage resources into the "Three Teachings" reform of vocational education. This work has thereby expanded the repertoire of culturally rich and locally grounded resources for vocational college labor education [10].

Overall, existing research has reached an academic consensus that the cultivation of labor values holds a central role in labor education. Currently, this field is exhibiting a clear developmental trend: a shift from purely theoretical indoctrination-based cultivation toward embodied, life-oriented experiential cultivation. However, how to transform abstract labor values into concrete and tangible educational experiences — thereby effectively ensuring that such values are deeply internalized and ingrained in individuals' minds and hearts — remains an area that requires continued exploration and in-depth investigation by the academic community.

5. Expansion of the Vehicle Functions for Internship/Practical Training and Social Practice

Internships, practical training, and social practice serve as the primary practical vehicles for higher vocational colleges to align with industrial demands and implement labor education. They also act as critical bridges connecting theoretical labor education within campus settings with authentic production work environments; the overall quality of their implementation directly determines the ultimate effectiveness of labor education. However, current practices in higher vocational labor education frequently encounter issues such as internships and practical training becoming mere formalities, and the absence of process-oriented evaluation mechanisms. These problems significantly undermine the labor education functions of internships, practical training, and social practice. Existing research therefore focuses on addressing these challenges by systematically optimizing the practical labor education framework in higher vocational colleges, thereby consolidating the practical foundation of labor education and fully leveraging the substantive educational potential of internships, practical training, and social practice.

Du Mancong et al. (2024) systematically analyzed existing issues in current internship and practical training programs within higher vocational education, including deviations from labor education objectives and a shortage of educational resources. They proposed a coordinated approach to advancing reforms across four core dimensions: integrating the cultivation of labor values throughout the entire internship and practical training process; establishing a supporting curriculum system aligned with labor education requirements; refining an evaluation and assessment framework with clear guidelines; and strengthening faculty support to meet educational needs — thereby fully unleashing the educational potential of internship and practical training programs [11]. Zhou Fudong et al. (2024) further explored integrated educational mechanisms combining formal labor education with open-ended social practices. They identified challenges in current integrated models, such as insufficient top-level strategic design and practical training base development that lags behind the demands of industrial upgrading and transformation. Consequently, they called for enhanced systematic integration planning at the institutional level, along with the consolidation of both on-campus and off-campus educational resources, to expand the scope of labor practice opportunities [12].

Meanwhile, Lin Jin and Xu Xiangfei (2024), from the perspective of high-quality development in vocational education, pointed out that current labor practice programs in higher vocational education face challenges such as weakened educational efficacy and rigid management systems. They advocated for the systematic development of practice-based labor courses, the optimization of resource allocation both within and outside educational institutions, and the reconstruction of a labor education practice framework for higher vocational education that aligns with the demands of the new era [13].

In summary, existing research has widely reached an academic consensus that "internships, practical training, and social practice constitute the core vehicles for labor education." However, there remains a notable gap in current explorations regarding how vocational colleges can establish long-term, stable school-enterprise collaborative labor education mechanisms, as well as how to innovate practical labor teaching approaches in the context of the digital economy's industrial transformation. Consequently, there is an urgent need for further expansion of large-sample empirical studies.

6. Conclusion

Existing research has yielded a wealth of findings regarding the model construction, pathway innovation, and value redefinition of labor education in higher vocational colleges. These studies have primarily explored how, from the perspectives of "cultivating virtue through education," the "simultaneous advancement of the five dimensions of education," and high-quality development, diverse approaches — such as SPOC-based blended teaching, integration of intangible cultural heritage, deepening of internship and practical training, and life-oriented practical activities — can address pressing issues in labor

education, including its superficial nature, disconnection from professional education, and limited evaluation frameworks. Scholars have widely emphasized the need to highlight the distinctive characteristics of vocational education, fostering deep integration of labor education with professional education, aesthetic education, social practice, and digital transformation. By adopting innovative models — such as "cultural immersion and four-dimensional enhancement" or the "three-dimensional comprehensive education" approach — researchers aim to strengthen the cultivation of labor values, refine the full-chain system encompassing "theory–practice–evaluation," and thereby enhance students 'labor literacy, professional ethos, and employment quality, ultimately achieving the substantive realization of labor education's pedagogical function.

Although numerous targeted strategies have already been proposed in existing research, future efforts should still focus on optimizing the top-level design and refining evaluation frameworks for integrating labor education with social practice. Particularly in the context of educational digital transformation, it is essential to further deepen the substantive characteristics of the "labor + digital + creativity" paradigm, thereby overcoming key bottlenecks such as inefficient resource utilization, homogenization tendencies, and institutional rigidity.

Future research should continue to explore refined implementation pathways grounded in embodied cognition, a life-oriented approach, and an employment-focused perspective; strengthen the development of university-enterprise partnerships and resource-sharing mechanisms; and facilitate the transformation of labor education from mere formal existence to superior quality, thereby providing more actionable theoretical support and practical paradigms for establishing a high-quality, sustainable labor education system within higher vocational education institutions.

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