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Innovating Teaching Methods of Political Education Towards the Development of Occupational Civic Competencies for Vocational College Students

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Abstract

In the context of vocational education undergoing a strong shift toward a competency-based approach, the subject of Political Education in vocational colleges is facing the requirement to comprehensively innovate its objectives, content, and teaching methods. This article clarifies the theoretical foundations of the competency-based approach in vocational education; analyzes the current state of teaching Political Education in vocational colleges under conditions of limited instructional time; and, on that basis, proposes orientations for innovating teaching methods toward the development of occupational civic competencies for students. The proposed solutions focus on developing competency-based learning outcomes, designing content closely linked to occupational practice, applying active teaching methods, and innovating competency-oriented assessment. The research findings contribute to reaffirming the role of Political Education in shaping students' attitudes toward life, work discipline, and civic responsibility in vocational colleges in the current period.

Keywords: Political Education, Vocational Colleges, Competency-Based Approach, Occupational Civic Competence, Students

1. Introduction

Political Education is a compulsory course in vocational college training programs and plays an important role in shaping students' scientific worldview, revolutionary outlook on life, and in fostering their political qualities, moral values, and lifestyles. However, in current teaching practice, this subject often fails to attract students' attention, and students tend to invest little effort in learning it. One of the primary reasons lies in the fact that the course content is heavily theoretical, while teaching methods remain predominantly lecture-based, with limited connection to students' occupational characteristics and practical labor experience.

Meanwhile, the demands of the labor market and modern society require not only skilled workers but also citizens with legal awareness, a sense of responsibility, adaptability, appropriate professional conduct, and positive attitudes toward life. This reality poses an urgent requirement to innovate the teaching methods of Political Education toward a competency-based orientation, particularly aiming at developing occupational civic competencies for vocational college students.

2. Theoretical Foundations of the Competency-Based Approach in Vocational Education

The competency-based approach in education is an outcome-oriented approach that focuses on developing learners' ability to interactively apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively address practical situations. According to perspectives presented in the Journal of Education, the competency-based approach is defined as an educational approach that concentrates on developing and accessing learners' competencies, in which competence is understood as the harmonious integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform tasks in real-life contexts. Unlike content-oriented teaching, competency-based teaching emphasizes learners' active role, viewing learning as a process of experience, practice, and self-construction of knowledge. As noted by scholars, learners' competencies cannot be formed primarily through listening to lectures but must be developed through activities, experiential learning, and the application of knowledge to practical situations.

For vocational education, the competency-based approach is particularly appropriate because training objectives do not stop at what learners know, but extend to what they can do and how they behave in specific occupational environments. Therefore, applying the competency-based approach to teaching Political Education not only enhances the effectiveness of students' acquisition of socio-political knowledge but also contributes to shaping professional identity, legal awareness, and civic responsibility among vocational college students.

Moreover, many studies affirm that practicality is a fundamental principle in teaching political theory subjects. Linking theoretical content to occupational contexts and concrete social situations makes political knowledge more accessible, meaningful, and applicable for learners in practice.

3. Current Situation of Teaching Political Education in Vocational Colleges

Based on teaching practice, professional research, and academic exchanges at several vocational colleges, it can be observed that the teaching of Political Education is currently strongly affected by changes in training programs, particularly the reduction of instructional time to 75 periods for the entire program since 2020. This adjustment poses several challenges to ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the subject.

First, the curriculum content remains heavily theoretical while instructional time has been reduced, and it has not been designed according to competency-based learning outcomes linked to specific occupations. With only 75 periods for the entire program, Political Education must cover a large body of fundamental theoretical knowledge on Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, the Party's guidelines, and State policies within a relatively short time. Consequently, lecturers are compelled to prioritize delivering core content in a compressed manner, leaving limited opportunities to organize experiential and application-oriented learning activities. In addition, the current curriculum is mainly structured around theoretical themes, with some overlap in concepts and content across chapters, yet it lacks clear descriptions of the competency's students are expected to achieve after each module.

For example, Chapter 9, "The Good Citizen, the Good Worker," remains at the level of recognition and comprehension and has not been transformed into specific occupational competencies such as applying labor law, handling workplace disciplinary violations, or demonstrating responsible behavior in enterprise environments. To help students understand more clearly, lecturers must invest additional time in researching occupational applications and clarifying how the content applies to specific professions so that students can visualize and apply it in practice.

Second, teaching methods still rely heavily on lecturing, while limited instructional time does not facilitate the implementation of active learning methods. In the context of reduced instructional hours, many lecturers are forced to choose traditional teaching methods to ensure coverage of the curriculum. Activities such as case-based learning, group discussion, project-based learning, or experiential learning linked to occupations, although highly effective in developing competencies, require significant preparation and classroom time. In reality, many lecturers struggle to balance the delivery of foundational theoretical knowledge with the

organization of active learning activities within the framework of 75 periods, resulting in the uneven and infrequent implementation of teaching innovation.

Third, vocational college students have not fully recognized the role of Political Education in shaping occupational competencies and civic responsibility. Due to the strong focus on practical professional skills in vocational training, students tend to prioritize vocational subjects, while general theoretical subjects receive less attention. The reduction of instructional time from 90 to 75 periods has led some students to adopt a superficial learning approach, lacking initiative and investing little effort in self-study and independent research. For instance, in discussions on the rights and obligations of young workers, many students struggle to relate political and legal knowledge to the specific occupational contexts they will enter after graduation, indicating that the educational effectiveness of the subject has not met expectations.

Fourth, facilities, technological infrastructure, and learning resources supporting teaching innovation remain insufficiently synchronized. Implementing competency-based teaching under limited instructional time requires strong support from educational technology and digital learning resources. However, in some vocational colleges, classrooms are not flexibly designed for group activities, and electronic learning resources and banks of occupational case studies remain inadequate, creating difficulties for lecturers in organizing experiential and practice-oriented learning activities.

From the above analyses, it can be seen that, in order to align with current trends, lecturers must undertake a strong renewal of teaching methods by streamlining content, enhancing practical relevance, and focusing on the development of learners' competencies. This constitutes an important practical basis for proposing solutions to innovate the teaching methods of Political Education in vocational colleges at present.

4. Concept and Structure of Occupational Civic Competence of Vocational College Students

In the context of educational reform toward a competency-based approach, clearly defining the concept and structure of occupational civic competence plays a foundational role, serving as the basis for designing objectives, content, teaching methods, and assessment in the instruction of Political Education in vocational colleges. This is particularly important under current conditions, where the instructional time allocated to the subject has been reduced to only 75 periods for the entire program, requiring content selection and instructional organization to be focused, non-dispersed, and oriented toward ensuring substantive educational effectiveness.

Conceptually, occupational civic competence of vocational college students is understood as the ability to integratively apply political and legal knowledge, civic attitudes, and occupational skills in order to behave appropriately and responsibly in working environments and social life. This competence reflects the holistic development of learners as both skilled workers and citizens possessing political awareness, legal consciousness, and social responsibility. This understanding is consistent with the prevailing competency-based approach in contemporary education, according to which competency-based education focuses on developing and assessing learners' competencies, which are formed through the integrated application of knowledge,

skills, and attitudes to effectively perform tasks in real-life contexts.

From a structural perspective, occupational civic competence of vocational college students comprises three fundamental components that are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

First, the knowledge component.

The knowledge component plays a foundational cognitive role in the structure of occupational civic competence, reflecting vocational college students' level of political and ideological understanding. The content of this component primarily focuses on the core issues of Political Education, including basic knowledge of the Party's guidelines and orientations, State policies, and major viewpoints and strategic directions concerning human development, socio-economic development, and the working class and labor force during the period of national industrialization and modernization. On this basis, students are equipped with initial awareness of legal regulations directly related to workers, such as citizens' rights and obligations, labor discipline, and occupational safety and hygiene in the workplace.

For vocational college students, political knowledge does not aim at providing in-depth theoretical or legal training, but rather at enabling learners to correctly understand the Party's guidelines, form positive life and work perspectives, and apply political awareness to practical situations in the workplace. For example, students can clearly recognize their responsibilities toward the labor collective, respect enterprise regulations and labor discipline, and at the same time know how to protect their legitimate rights on the basis of legal compliance and commonly accepted social norms.

Second, the attitude component.

Attitudes reflect students' stances, viewpoints, and motivations for action in occupational and social environments. Occupational civic competence requires learners to develop a sense of social responsibility, professional ethics, legal compliance, industrial work discipline, and respect for labor regulations. In teaching practice, this component is difficult to cultivate solely through theoretical transmission; instead, it needs to be fostered through experiential activities, case-based discussions, and direct linkage to students' future occupational environments.

Third, the skills component.

The skills component represents the direct manifestation of occupational civic competence in practical action, reflecting students' ability to apply political knowledge and civic attitudes to concrete situations in working environments and social life. Core skills include the ability to analyze and handle occupational and social situations arising in the course of work; the ability to make responsible decisions based on compliance with the Party's guidelines, State laws, and social ethical standards; skills in communication, cooperation, and appropriate conduct within labor collectives; as well as the capacity to participate in collective and community activities with the spirit of active citizenship.

For vocational college students, occupational civic skills are not identical to technical vocational skills; rather, they primarily concern appropriate conduct as both workers and citizens. For instance, students need to be able to identify and

appropriately address situations related to labor discipline, labor relations conflicts, or ethical issues arising in the workplace; to choose suitable modes of conduct; to respect collective interests; and to maintain industrial work discipline and the professional image of workers in the context of integration.

The three components knowledge, attitudes, and skills do not exist independently but are organically unified in the process of forming and developing occupational civic competence. In this relationship, knowledge serves as the cognitive foundation, attitudes guide behavior, and skills concretize competence in practical action. From this perspective, the objective of teaching Political Education in vocational colleges extends beyond the mere transmission of theoretical knowledge, aiming instead to shape students into workers who possess not only professional competence but also political resilience and the behavioral standards of responsible citizens, thereby meeting the requirements of the labor market and contemporary society.

5. Proposals for Innovating the Teaching of Political Education toward the Development of Occupational Civic Competence

Based on the analysis of the current teaching situation and the identified structure of occupational civic competence of vocational college students, the innovation of teaching methods in Political Education should be implemented in a systematic and focused manner, in alignment with the characteristics of vocational training and the current constraints on instructional time. Below are several specific orientations and solutions.

5.1. Developing Course Learning Outcomes toward Competency Development

The learning outcomes of the Political Education course should be defined in a learner-centered, competency-based manner, clearly articulating what students are able to perform upon completion of the course rather than merely listing the knowledge content to be acquired. The shift from knowledge-based descriptions to competency-based outcomes helps clarify the educational objectives of the course, while simultaneously providing a scientific basis for lecturers in organizing content, selecting teaching methods, and designing appropriate assessment activities.

In the context where instructional time at the vocational college level has been reduced to only 75 periods for the entire program, the development of competency-based learning outcomes needs to be streamlined, selective, and focused. Learning outcomes should concentrate on essential competencies required of young workers, directly linked to occupational environments and social life. Such an approach not only helps prevent content dispersion and overload but also clarifies the practical significance of Political Education in the formation of occupational civic competence among vocational college students.

5.2. Designing Teaching Content Linked to Occupations and Practical Situations

The teaching content of Political Education should be reorganized to link political theory with students' occupational practice, with particular emphasis on clarifying the Party's guidelines, State policies, and guiding perspectives on human development and the workforce during the period of national industrialization and

modernization. Content design does not aim to transform the subject into a law or vocational skills course; rather, it seeks to enable students to correctly understand, trust, and apply political viewpoints to their life attitudes and work behavior in occupational settings.

Accordingly, each learning theme should be constructed around practical issues that vocational college students are likely to encounter when entering the labor market, such as discipline awareness and industrial work style, workers' responsibility toward collectives and society, professional ethics, cooperation, and appropriate conduct in accordance with common enterprise norms. By relating these issues to the Party's and the State's policies on workers, lecturers help students clearly recognize their roles and positions in the process of socio-economic development.

For example, when teaching content on citizens' rights and obligations, lecturers can organize discussions on situations related to compliance with labor discipline, maintaining industrial work style, or behavioral responses to conflicts arising in the workplace. The analysis of such situations does not aim to delve deeply into specific legal regulations but focuses on clarifying the Party's and the State's viewpoints on building a disciplined, responsible, and ethically grounded workforce. Through this process, students not only understand political theory but also develop the ability to apply political awareness to their daily occupational behavior, thereby enhancing the practicality and educational effectiveness of the course.

5.3. Applying Active Teaching Methods under a Competency-Based Approach

Innovating teaching methods constitutes a key component in developing occupational civic competence among students. Priority should be given to active teaching methods such as case-based learning, project-based learning, guided debates, flipped classrooms, and community-linked experiential activities. These approaches enable students to directly participate in the learning process, actively explore, discuss, critique, and solve problems, rather than passively receiving one-way information.

In this process, the role of the lecturer needs to shift from that of a "knowledge transmitter" to that of a "learning organizer, facilitator, and supporter," creating an active learning environment that encourages students to express their viewpoints and relate knowledge to occupational practice.

5.4. Innovating Assessment toward Competency Development

Assessment of learning outcomes in Political Education should be adjusted to evaluate the degree of formation and development of students' occupational civic competence, rather than merely testing their ability to memorize and reproduce theoretical knowledge. This approach requires assessment to be closely linked to the learning process and to students' capacity to apply political awareness to practical situations in study, work, and social life.

Accordingly, assessment methods should be diversified, with emphasis on collecting learning evidence that reflects both the process and outcomes of students' competency development. Such evidence may include case-based analytical assignments related to occupational contexts, group learning products, experiential reports, learning journals, or individual competency portfolios. These assessment forms enable lecturers to observe changes in

students' cognition, attitudes, and behavioral capacities in a manner consistent with the educational objectives of the course.

To ensure transparency and objectivity in assessment, it is necessary to develop clear criteria and scoring rubrics for each competency. The use of assessment rubrics helps standardize evaluation practices among lecturers while enabling students to clearly understand expected outcomes, thereby encouraging them to proactively adjust their learning activities. In addition, a balanced combination of formative and summative assessment is required to comprehensively reflect students' progress and actual competencies throughout the learning process.

A competency-based assessment approach not only promotes students' active, self-directed, and responsible learning but also enables lecturers to timely adjust teaching content and methods, ensuring that Political Education truly fulfills its role in developing occupational civic competence for vocational college students.

6. Conclusion

In the context of educational reform toward the development of learners' competencies, innovating the teaching methods of Political Education in vocational colleges is both an inevitable requirement and a matter of profound practical significance. The article demonstrates that, under conditions of reduced instructional time, without appropriate adjustments to objectives, content, and teaching methods, Political Education would find it difficult to effectively fulfill its role in fostering students' ideological awareness, moral values, and civic responsibility.

By clarifying the concept and structure of occupational civic competence, the article proposes competency-based orientations for innovating teaching methods with the aim of linking political theory to learners' occupational practice. These orientations not only contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of teaching Political Education but also help students develop appropriate life attitudes, disciplined work styles, and a strong sense of social responsibility. Through this process, Political Education affirms its role within vocational college training programs by contributing to the development of human resources who possess both professional competence and political resilience, as well as the civic qualities required in the current context of socio-economic development.

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