

Some Approaches in Innovating Students' Professional Internship Activities

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ABSTRACT

“Education is the top national policy, and the development of education and training aims to enhance intellectuality, cultivate human resources, and nurture talents. The focus of education has shifted from merely imparting knowledge to comprehensive development of learners' abilities and qualities; theory is integrated with practice”. To implement this policy, each university need to systematically innovate their curriculum, content, teaching and learning methods, and build a qualified teaching staff; continue to innovate the management mechanism of education and training based on enhancing the autonomy and responsibility of educational institutions; and effectively manage the goals and quality of education and training. Internship is a mandatory activity that plays a leading role in honing professional skills for students and is an important part of the training work of universities. To improve the quality of education, universities need to pay special attention to professional internships and innovate them. In this article, we discuss several approaches to innovating professional internships: approaching training outcomes, approaching competencies, approaching the transformation of the training process into self-training, and approaching meeting societal demands. These approaches serve as the scientific basis for innovating professional internships. Innovating professional internships for university students requires systematic innovation of various elements: objectives, standards of internship outcomes, internship content, internship organization methods, and methods of evaluating internship results. Depending on the characteristics of each training field, universities can flexibly apply suitable approaches tailored to the specific nature of the field and the internship facilities.

Keywords: Approach model, professional internship, students

clearly defined the principle of education as "Learning goes hand in hand with practice, theory is closely linked to practice, and school education is combined with family and social education" [1]. The amended Higher Education Law (2018) also specifies the goals of higher education as "Training learners with political qualities, ethics; providing knowledge, practical skills in the profession, research capability, and development of science and technology applications commensurate with the training level; ensuring health; fostering creativity and professional responsibility, adaptation to the work environment; and instilling a sense of serving the people" [2]. These serve as guiding principles directing the training activities at present-day universities in VietNam.

Professional internship is an activity that hones the professional skills of learners in real work environments after they have been equipped with theoretical knowledge and professional expertise at their educational institutions before graduation. Professional internship is an important and mandatory component in the curriculum of any field of study at the university level. The benefits of professional internship include: realizing the principle of learning along with practice, integrating theoretical education with practical application, contributing significantly to knowledge systematization, developing and enhancing professional skills, fostering ethical qualities and lifestyles, enhancing awareness, and cultivating a love for the profession among students. Moreover, it helps educational institutions self-assess and evaluate the quality of their training programs in line with societal development requirements. It also provides students with the opportunity to adapt to the work environment, prepare for, and meet the basic professional requirements of their respective fields. In many cases, professional internship serves as an opportunity for students to choose and seek suitable job opportunities after graduation.

In recent times, some studies have considered "professional internship" as a means to develop skills, competencies, or professional values

I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Education Law, VietNam (2019) has

for students [3], [4], [5]. This underscores the important role of this content in university-level training programs oriented towards developing students' practical capabilities. Despite its significance, student internships at universities have not been innovated much in terms of goals, content, organization methods, evaluation methods, etc., making it difficult to meet the trends of training according to the approach of outcomes standards, competencies, and meeting societal demands. Therefore, there is a great need for innovation in professional internships in vocational training at universities..

II. RESEARCH RESULTS

2.1. Concept of professional internship

According to author Hoang Phe and colleagues have defined internship as "practical training in real-life situations to apply and reinforce theoretical knowledge, enhance expertise, and develop professional skills" [6]. Internship is further understood as a practical activity following theoretical studies with the specific purpose of concretizing and reinforcing knowledge, developing observational and cognitive abilities, and forming necessary skills and techniques for independent living in the future. Systematic and regular internship is the most important method to ensure the principle of education theory relating to practice [7].

According to author Nguyen Thị Thuy Dung, "Professional internship in the university training process is the organizational form of bringing students to workplaces to apply the specialized knowledge and skills they have learned at the university, to practice the tasks of the trained position, thereby reinforcing and enhancing expertise, professional skills, attitudes, and ethical qualities" [8].

In vocational training at universities, there are various terms used for internships such as apprenticeship, professional internship, vocational internship, graduation internship, etc. Most commonly, vocational training at universities is vocational education: "Vocational education is teaching and learning activities aimed at equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes necessary for them to find employment or create employment opportunities after completing a course or to enhance their professional skills" [9]. Therefore, in terms of terminology, internship in vocational training at universities should be understood as vocational internship.

The professional internship activities of

students are a system of activities in the real working environment of students before graduation with the goal of applying and reinforcing theoretical knowledge, exchanging professional expertise, forming professional skills learned under the guidance of responsible individuals at the internship site and instructors; thereby forming, reinforcing, and developing knowledge, professional skills; cultivating qualities, ethics, awareness of responsibility, and nurturing a love for the profession in students.

From the analyses above, in this study, we believe that: The vocational internship of university students is a process in which the university organizes for students to experience the profession at workplaces so that students can apply the knowledge, expertise, and skills they have learned at the university to perform tasks of the trained position, thereby forming and developing professional qualities and capabilities for students according to the set training goals.

From the perspectives of vocational internships, it can be seen that vocational internships help students: Practice tasks of the trained position/apply knowledge learned in practice; develop and refine professional skills; cultivate professional attitudes; experience real challenges, adapt to professional work; build personal profiles, increase recruitment opportunities, and job opportunities after graduation..

2.2. Some approaches to professional internships for university students

2.2.1. Approach based on program outcomes standards

Under the influence of globalization, along with the development of educational trends towards standards, the concept of learning outcomes has become widespread in higher education and is a top concern in curriculum design and development. According to Nguyễn Quốc Chính and colleagues, learning outcomes are seen as the "backbone" of a training program because good learning outcomes will provide good direction for the training program, while inappropriate learning outcomes may hinder the development of teaching and learning activities. The current context of regional and global integration has increased pressure on universities to be accountable, to provide information to society about the quality of teaching and learning activities. Therefore, information about learning outcomes that universities commit to providing to students upon graduation is receiving increasing

attention from all stakeholders including administrators, students, alumni, employers, and parents [10].

In the documents of the 11th National Congress of the Party, it was also identified: "One of the new directions in education and training is innovation towards standardization. Fundamental and comprehensive innovation of Vietnam's education system towards standardization, modernization, socialization, democratization, and international integration, in which innovation of education management mechanisms, development of teaching staff and education management personnel are key factors". Additionally, the Prime Minister also issued Decision No. 1982/QĐ-TTg on October 18, 2016 approving the national qualifications framework of Vietnam, which also regulates the standardization of competencies, minimum learning volumes for vocational and higher education levels in VietNam [11], [12].

According to the Ministry of Education and Training, "learning outcomes are the minimum requirements for knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional responsibilities that learners achieve upon completing a training program, which the training institution commits to learners, society, and publicly announces along with conditions for implementation". In recent years, universities have focused on and continuously strived to develop and improve learning outcomes. At the state management level, the Ministry of Education and Training has issued many directives and guidelines such as: Circular No. 2196/BGDĐT-GDĐH dated April 22, 2010 guiding universities, academies, and colleges nationwide to develop and publish learning outcome standards for training disciplines; Circular No. 07/2015/TT-BGDĐT dated April 16, 2015 stipulating the minimum knowledge volume, competency requirements that learners achieve upon graduation for each level of training. Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT dated May 19, 2017 of the Ministry of Education and Training issued regulations on quality accreditation of higher education institutions affirming that the quality, training results must be measured, evaluated through criteria such as the employability of learners after graduation. The evaluation of learning outcomes of universities is conducted regularly annually through surveys of the employment situation of students after 1 year of graduation; Circular No. 01/2024/TT-BGDĐT dated February 5, 2024 of the Ministry of Education and Training issued the Standards for Higher Education Institutions [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18].

The learning outcomes of a training program reflect the institutional responsibility to learners and society. The publication of learning outcomes is the basis for helping learners know the specialized knowledge provided, professional competency standards, practical skills, and problem-solving abilities after a training course, and is also the basis for building training programs and organizing training activities of an institution. Currently, all universities have published learning outcomes and manage training activities according to the learning outcomes approach. The learning outcomes approach to vocational internships for university students involves building vocational internship learning outcome standards based on training learning outcomes. Because this standard specifies the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed for students to adapt to the professional job market upon graduation..

2.2.2. Approach based on competency-oriented approach

Competence is the synthesis of elements including knowledge, skills, and attitudes of an individual, aimed at meeting the requirements of an activity, ensuring that the activity is carried out in the right direction, achieving results, and maintaining quality as defined objectives. The formation and development of competence depend on the comprehensive development of mental and physiological factors, ensuring that individuals have in-depth knowledge of the field they are engaged in; have practical skills to perform appropriate actions suitable to the nature, characteristics, requirements, and circumstances of the activity. The organic combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards an activity will form competence, ensuring that individuals quickly find methods and measures to carry out the activity and ensure that the activity achieves appropriate results as defined objectives. Only individuals with appropriate mental and physiological qualities required by the activity, who are well-trained, serious, and actively participate in suitable training activities, have the conditions to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes to meet the requirements of the activity and ensure the quality and effectiveness of that activity.

The level of development of competence depends on the development of three fundamental elements: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the combined, harmonious, and supportive interaction among these elements.

Competence helps individuals quickly achieve mastery, ensuring quality and effectiveness in their work. Those with competence in a particular field will quickly achieve goals regarding knowledge, skills, grasp core issues that need to be addressed, and have professional competence, thus achieving set goals early.

The professional internship activities of university students oriented towards developing competence are a process of harnessing the active and proactive nature of learners in applying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they have learned into practical professional activities according to responsibilities and tasks, thereby contributing to reinforcing, supplementing, and developing theory, honing skills, expertise, and comprehensive development according to training objectives and requirements.

Bernd Meier and Nguyễn Văn Cường argue that the professional internship of university students needs to approach competence because "Competency-oriented education aims to ensure the quality of teaching and learning outcomes, achieve the goal of developing comprehensive personal qualities, emphasize the application of competencies, the application of knowledge in practical situations to prepare individuals with problem-solving abilities for life and profession" [19].

Approaching competence in the professional internship of university students focuses on developing and assessing the professional competence (skills, attitudes) of students during the professional internship; so that graduating students can adapt to professional work and achieve success in their careers. What needs to be noted in the professional internship of university students is the need to integrate the approach to learning outcomes of professional internships with the approach to competence. In doing so, the learning outcomes of professional internships are built based on the approach to professional competence (broadly speaking, the learning outcomes of training and professional standards are developed based on the approach to professional competence)..

2.2.3. Approach based on transforming the training process into a self-learning process

Our party has set out the basic orientation in education and training today: "Promoting the education process from primarily equipping knowledge to developing comprehensive competencies and qualities of learners." For higher education, the defined objective is: "Focusing on

training high-level human resources, nurturing talents, developing qualities and self-learning capabilities, enriching knowledge, and creativity of learners." [20].

In the trend of innovating higher education, learning outcomes are often built closely linked to the four pillars of higher education by UNESCO: Learning to know; Learning to do; Learning to live together; Learning to be. Education in general, and training at universities in particular, need to approach the transformation of the training process into a self-directed learning process. Therefore, the professional internship of university students needs to approach the transformation of the training process into a self-directed learning process. This is an important issue regarding university education methodology.

Referring to the basic requirements of university education methodology, in the book "Philosophy of Vietnamese Education: From Tradition to Modernity", author Tran Ngoc Them argues: "The basic requirement of university education methodology is to place the learner at the center of educational activities; to make learning the central task of educational activities." [21]. From this standpoint, it can be determined that: Approaching the transformation of the training process into a self-directed learning process in the professional internship of university students is to make students the central figures in internship activities; to make student practice the central task in the internship process.

Specifically: Making students the central figures in internship activities: Educational institutions, internship bases play the role of assigning tasks, guiding, and providing conditions for students to practice professional work; students become active participants, with consciousness, needs, knowing how to create interest and enthusiasm for work; Making student practice the central task in the internship process: students must know how to learn, know how to do, know how to communicate socially..., know how to improve professional qualities and capabilities, creating dynamism and creativity in the internship process..

2.2.4. Approach based on meeting societal demands

According to Article 12, paragraph 1 of the Higher Education Law, it states: "Developing higher education to train high-level human resources, meeting the requirements of socio-economic development, ensuring national defense and security." Therefore, higher education "plays an important role in training workers to meet social

requirements: possessing political qualities, ethics; having knowledge, practical skills in the profession, research capabilities and the development and application of science and technology; having health; having creativity and professional responsibility, adapting to the work environment"[2].

According to the above argument, the professional internship of university students needs to be approached in a way that meets social requirements, meaning that the goals, content, and methods of professional internships must be closely linked to the practical needs and demands, in order to ensure the quality of training and meet the requirements of socio-economic development..

2.3. Application of the approaches in innovating professional internships for students

2.3.1. Innovating the objectives, standards of professional internship outcomes

Innovating professional internships for university students needs to start with innovating the objectives and internship standards. Firstly, it is necessary to establish general and specific objectives for professional internships. Based on the system of defined objectives, they are then detailed into internship standards.

The objectives and internship standards are built based on approaches such as training outcomes, professional standards, competencies, transforming the training process into a self-training process, and meeting social requirements. Analyzing to clearly see the requirements of each approach, in practice, these approaches are often emphasized and integrated into the development of professional standards.

2.3.2. Innovating the content of professional internships

The content of internships for students is typically designed by universities with a job-oriented approach, corresponding to specific job positions. This means that for each job position, there will be specific job tasks, and internships will cover these tasks accordingly. Naturally, internships focusing on these job tasks will fulfill the defined training objectives.

Currently, the new direction in setting internship objectives and standards in education is based on a competency approach. Therefore, to meet these internship objectives and standards developed with a competency-based approach, there is a need to innovate how the content of professional internships is determined according to competency-based approaches. Specifically,

internship content is developed based on the approach of internship standards, meaning it is built upon approaches such as training outcomes, professional standards, competencies, transforming the training process into a self-training process, and meeting social requirements. However, it's important to note that determining internship content based on these approaches also needs to inherit the method of determining internship content based on job-oriented approaches..

2.3.3. Innovating the methods of professional internships

The current method of professional internships for university students is typically organized by universities in concentrated batches. This means that a university training course organizes several internship sessions, each lasting for a specific number of weeks. The batch-focused internship model is suitable for internship content based on a job-oriented approach but reveals some drawbacks and limitations: the internship duration is not sufficient for students to consolidate and enhance professional skills; the role and responsibility of the internship facility in vocational training are not fully utilized; vocational training at universities is not closely linked to vocational facilities, making it difficult to meet societal demands.

In the batch-focused internship method, students have brief contact with the internship facility, and the time for honing professional skills is limited. Internship content based on job-oriented approaches is delivered in a fragmented manner, and students do not develop deep relationships with the internship facility; they are merely "outsiders" passing through the facility for a short period. Consequently, the development and enhancement of professional qualities and skills are limited. The batch-focused internship method becomes even more problematic when innovating the content of professional internships based on vocational standards and competency approaches. Content based on these approaches requires long and frequent internship durations for students to develop and enhance essential professional qualities and competencies.

To address this, there is a need to innovate the internship method from batch-focused to frequent internship. Frequent internships involve organizing students to intern at the internship facility for an extended period throughout the training course. Internship activities for students run parallel to their educational activities at the university. With frequent internships, students

intern regularly, weekly, monthly, or yearly at the internship facility, considering it as their "home" and a place for self-improvement, learning, and growth. The frequent internship method will overcome the limitations of the batch-focused method and offer several advantages: students consider the internship facility as their "home," providing an environment for improvement, learning, and growth; it provides ample opportunities to enhance professional qualities and skills, facilitating adaptation to the profession and work environment immediately after graduation..

2.3.4. Innovating the evaluation of the results of professional internships

The evaluation of professional internship results for students currently poses many limitations and shortcomings: There is a lack of scientific evaluation tools, a shortage of essential standards and criteria; evaluations are subjective, dependent on the evaluator's subjectivity and experience. When innovating the objectives, content, and methods of professional internships, it is imperative to innovate the evaluation of internship results. The innovation of evaluating professional internship results should take into account the following considerations: Evaluation should be based on students' consciousness, attitude, qualities, and competencies demonstrated during the internship; It is necessary to establish specific standards, criteria for evaluation, and have authentic, appropriate evidence..

III. CONCLUSION

Professional internships play a mandatory and leading role in honing professional skills for students and are a crucial aspect of university education. To enhance the quality of education, universities need to pay special attention to professional internships and innovate them. The innovation of professional internships should be based on several approaches: approaching professional outcome standards, approaching competencies, approaching the transformation of the training process into a self-training process, and approaching meeting societal demands. These approaches provide a scientific foundation for innovating professional internships. Innovating professional internships for university students requires synchronously innovating various elements: objectives, standards for internship outcomes, internship content, internship methods, and internship result evaluation. Depending on the characteristics of each training field, universities can flexibly apply appropriate methods suitable for

the specific nature of the field and the internship facilities.

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