

# The Third-Party Assessment to Quality Improvement of Higher Vocational Education in China

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**ABSTRACT.** *Making assessment to vocational colleges by a third-party entity is a very important way to improve the quality and administration ability of vocational education. This paper interpreted the basic connotation of third-party assessment in vocational education, explored the specific role of the third-party assessment in the quality assurance and discussed about the construction of a third-party assessment mechanism.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Third-party assessment; Vocational education; Quality assurance*

## 1. The connotation of the third-party assessment in vocational education

In the whole process of teaching implementation, which was reflected on the theory used to guide teach, teaching models, teaching methods, teaching resources etc., whether have achieved teaching objectives. And based on this, new ideas for teaching reform, adjustments to teaching programs, and revision to teaching process were proposed. A series of decisions, such as teaching documents and teacher training, all of these activities is called teaching assessment. In the past history of educational assessment, the teaching assessment of vocational education is completed by the educational administrative department. But with the development of the economy and the changes of the times, this assessment model is increasingly unable to adapt to the assessment needs of all parties, so third-party assessment has become a new major topic. The third-party assessment is actually derived from the separation and development of the education management. Because of its objectivity and impartiality, it has become an important measure to promote education reform and an important means to modernize the education governance model. The third-party assessment in vocational education is a way by which vocational education is assessed by third-party organizations or institutions outside the government and vocational colleges [1]. The third-party organizations or institutions must have assessment qualifications and are independent of government department, vocational colleges and some social entities including enterprises.

Three characteristics ensured the effectiveness of the third party assessment. The first characteristic is the professional authority. This is the most basic rule that

assessment institutions should obey. It is mainly reflected in the assessment process, standard and method that used to assessment work. Firstly, the assessment institution should have a team with professional knowledge, good assessment experience and good ethics. On one aspect, the person who carry out the assessment work should have a deep understanding and accurate grasp on vocational education, technology talent training, and schooling running, so that he or she can make scientific decisions on the complex educational issues. On the other aspect, because the assessment work is related to deciding on the degree of value in education, if the assessment maker can't keep an impartial position, it may negatively influence the professionalism and authority of the organization. Therefore, only when the assessment decisions are made by professional person, strictly obey the assessment procedures and based upon the scientific standards, can we assure of the professionalism and authority of the assessment organization. Furthermore, the assessment institutions should have made a long-term observation on the school running process, and the data must be scientifically collected and analyzed.

The second characteristic of the third-party assessment is independency. It refers to that the assessment entity is independent from government and any other organizations in resources and administration. However, during the development of assessment institutions, they will have connections with other organizations on information exchange, communication and cooperation with government department, colleges and enterprises. To maintain the independency of the assessment is the key factor to keep the continuous development in the long run.

The third main characteristic of the third-party assessment organization is nonprofit, which is decided by the object and content of the assessment work. The assessment organizations may have the ability to make profit but their purpose is to make social profit, ie. to improve the ability to cultivate vocational technical talents and the quality of vocational education, whose nature is to improve the public social profit, push the social production force and social development to go forward. Therefore, the service of assessment organizations provide is the public profit and is provided with some payment but the final purpose is not on economic profit, and only by keeping this rule can maintain the public profit in top consideration and can maintain the educational equality and social justice.

## **2. Constructing the Third-Party Assessment of Vocational Education**

### ***2.1 Deeply Promote the Separation of Management and Assessment***

Under the government's decentralization of power and vigorously promoting education reform, it is necessary to achieve a high degree of innovation in assessment mechanism to promote construction and improve the quality of vocational education. As an important form of social strength to participate in educational assessment, third-party assessments begin to show their important value. For a long time, the education assessment has been completed by the educational department. The assessment content was focused on the results, and the assessment

process lacks participation of industry representatives. Promoting the third-party assessment is an important path in vocational education to improve the credibility and effectiveness of educational assessment. To set up a third-party assessment mechanism and authorize some social organizations to assess and monitor vocational schools and colleges is an important part of the separation reform in vocational education administration. Under the background of separation reform to promote the third party is not only the implementation of Chinese educational policies but also conducive to deepening the separation of administration, school running and assessment reform.

To implement the third party assessment is a breakthrough for the separation of administration, school running and assessment reform, whose main purpose is to define clearly the right and responsibility of educational government department, vocational schools and colleges and society. And in the process of making assessment, to encourage more stakeholders participate the assessment can make the result more inclusive, more impartial and more accurate.

### ***2.2 Promote the Integration of Vocational Education and Industry***

Constructing the third-party assessment mechanism helps to promote the separation of management and assessment, meets the needs of self-sponsorship in vocational colleges, and enhances the vitality of vocational colleges. It is also an important way to promote the teaching reform and better integration of production and education in vocational colleges. The separation of management, school running and assessment can make assessment an important link between management and running schools. Because of the independency of third-party assessment agencies, the education assessment free from influence of power is more impartial. The third-party assessment is more conducive to vocational colleges to recognize more clearly about the limitations and shortcomings of their own development, and improve the quality of vocational education [2]. In the third-party assessment model, enterprises can participate in the assessment of vocational education as a third party, so that they will have sufficient participation and voice in the development and assessment of vocational education which are gradually more integrated into vocational education.

### ***2.3 Optimize the Management Mode of Vocational Education***

The construction of third-party assessment mechanism for vocational education is the main way to promote the reform of the governance model of vocational colleges. The government had always been in a dominant position in the administration of vocational education. Vocational colleges were always passively assessed [3]. In the past, the discourse space for vocational colleges and enterprises to do assessing work in vocational education was very limited. Independent third-party assessment agencies will make the management system more scientific and effective. Government, vocational colleges and third-party assessment agencies can achieve multi-party constraints, supervision and balance. The three parties can

balance each other on the basis of synergy, which not only optimizes the management model, but also benefits. The construction of a vocational education governance system, the establishment of third-party assessment and third-party assessment mechanism can promote the transformation of vocational education management from traditional management to social governance, from government authority to market professional authority, from administrative assessment to social assessment, therefore achieve more modernization and a more scientific administration model.

### **3. Building a Third-Party Assessment Mechanism for Vocational Colleges**

#### ***3.1 System Supply Mechanism***

First, to explore and improve the policies and measures of third-party organizations, clarify the organization, management and guarantee of third-party assessments, and define responsibilities, rights and interests of all parties will built up a sound assessment regulation system. For example, the criteria for the choosing of third-party assessment agencies, the qualification criteria for professionals who do the actual assessment work, the third-party assessment system and the requirements for standards, etc., provide a strong institutional guarantee for the third-party assessment of vocational education that is still in its infancy stage in Chinese education system.

Second, structural assurance is the premise. This refers to whether the government can properly withdraw from the assessment work in vocational education, which is the key to development the third-party assessment system.

Third, in the process of constructing the institutional system, it is necessary to develop the theoretical and empirical research, and the theory and method may come from social, economic, and educational area that can contribute to assessment methods and models.

#### ***3.2 Monitoring and Eliminating Mechanism***

Relevant government departments or administrative organizations shall establish an access and eliminating mechanism for third-party assessment agencies, and establish relevant qualification examination departments. For assessment institutions that do not meet the requirements, they shall be automatically listed in the waiting list to subject to further qualification aprovement and review. Third-party assessment agencies should have advanced assessment concepts, standardized assessment procedures [4], optimized assessment standards, professionals to carry out the assessment, good organizational guarantees, and follow-up rigorous feedback on assessment results. Third-party assessment agencies should enhance the internal power of self-development, including information collection capabilities and talents reserve capabilities, which are based on th support from the external environment. The establishment of the selecting and eliminating mechanism can standardize

third-party assessment agency behaviour. This may include the access mechanism, foster third-party assessment entities of the market, and select qualified research institutions, universities, intermediaries, etc. as third-party assessment agencies for vocational education to carry out assessment work. At the same time, setting up a system to monitor the assessment work done by the third-party agencies and eliminate the unqualified organizations will contribute the substantial development of the the third-party assessment system thus benefit the vocational education.

### ***3.3 Standard Optimization Mechanism***

As a third-party entity, the assessment agency should provide high-quality services, not only to optimize the assessment process and methods, but also to continuously improve the assessment criteria, including the assessment framework and indicator system. In the process of daily teaching and development of vocational education [5], third-party assessment agencies should simultaneously set performance targets and assessment benchmarks reasonably, should update and optimize the indicator system in a timely manner. The design of vocational education assessment benchmarks should reflect the educational policy of China and the development concepts of vocational education, should clarify the framework of the assessment and the dimensions of each subdivision, and pay attention to the flexibility of the specific content of each element. In addition, for the assessment benchmark system, a sound benchmark optimization mechanism and feedback adjustment mechanism should be established, so that the system can be adjusted and optimized in a timely manner with the progress of the development of education.

### ***3.4 Information Transfer Mechanism***

The third-party assessment agencies shall establish regular communication channels with the administrative departments in vocational education. They will communicate with vocational colleges, enterprises and other relevant departments to conduct multi-party discussions about specific work, details of the assessment, and analysis and adjustment of the assessment plan. In the information age, information technology can be used to make communication more real-time and convenient. Therefore, it is possible to build an information communication and delivery platform that not only ensures information exchange and resource sharing on the platform, but also enables the client to participate more thus improve the status of industries, enterprises, students, and parents <sup>[6]</sup>. Using the information platform, it is also possible to construct a more effective negotiation mechanism so that all parties can discuss assessment benchmarks, assessment criterias, assessment results and other issues on the basis of information technology, and reach an agreement on the platform. In addition, through the information platform, third-party assessment agencies can accept extensive supervision from the society, improve their service quality, and promote the efficiency of assessment work.

#### 4. Conclusion

The third-party assessment in vocational education can make the assessment results more impartial, professional and gain authority from public. By establishing a third-party assessment mechanism for vocational education, standardizing the third-party assessment process from the aspects of institutional supply mechanism, selecting and eliminating mechanism, standard optimization mechanism, and information transmission mechanism, is very important for promoting the integration of vocational education and industry, which finally lead to high quality vocational education.

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