

Cultivation from Skills Training to Value Shaping in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract: Fueled by the digital upgrading of the accommodation industry and the transformation of cross-border cultural tourism consumption, the hospitality sector is witnessing a structural shift in its talent requirements. The traditional skill-based training model, with its heavy emphasis on practical operations, can no longer meet industry needs. Consequently, compound talents equipped with both digital capabilities and strong professional qualities have emerged as a critically scarce resource. Currently, some higher vocational hotel management programs remain trapped in a narrow, skill-centric mindset, a paradigm that perpetuates curricular imbalances and systematically marginalizes professional values cultivation. As a result, a growing disconnect between talent supply and industry demand has emerged, further compounded by graduates' persistently weak professional identity. To address these challenges, this paper critically examines the inherent deficiencies of the prevailing skill-based education model in higher vocational hotel management and explores five viable reform pathways: educational philosophy, curriculum restructuring, pedagogical innovation, assessment mechanisms, and faculty development. A collaborative cultivation system integrating "skills training and value shaping" is therefore proposed to help the discipline break through its developmental impasse and produce high-quality compound talents for the cultural tourism and accommodation industry.

Key words: Hotel management major; skill-based education; value shaping

1. Introduction

The world of hotels will change forever thanks to economic globalization and digital transformation. It is seen that emerging formats like smart living, high-end accommodation with a wellness touch, and cross-border boutique homestays are rapidly growing and are pushing the service sector of accommodation to a sophisticated, personalized, and holistic service model. The modern hotel industry gives more consideration to the overall soft power of employees, which is in contrast with the old model that was low cost and labour-oriented. In this regard, humanistic empathy, professional value identity, and communication skills across the cultural sphere have become the most important markers of talent competitiveness.

Higher vocational colleges are the main source of talent supply, play an important role in the cultural tourism industry of the region, and have the essential responsibility to promote high-quality development of the regional and global cultural tourism industry. Hence, the development of all-round professional attributes has been the main concern of the reform of vocational education. UNESCO specifically mentions that the aim of vocational education is to provide learners with knowledge, skills, values, and professional attributes for professional life and decent work^[1]. In 2026, the Ministry of Education of China released guidelines for a transition from knowledge transmission to all-round capability development and streamlined curriculum, programs, and faculty to facilitate students' all-round development^[2]. This conversation has been greatly enriched by the contributions of academia. Jin Wenxue believed that the training of creative hotel management talents should focus on students' emotional cultivation, moral cultivation, and personality

cultivation^[3]. Zeng Tianshan suggested that the focus of vocational education should be gradually transitioned from skill training to providing quality education, with professional quality education as an integral part of skilled talent cultivation^[4].

The instrumentalist approach that has been introduced from the era of industrialization is still being used by many higher vocational colleges. While this model addresses short-term shortages of grassroots labor, it often leads to fuzzy values for students, a poor sense of belonging for professionals, and restricted career progression. The "2025 China Hotel Industry Professional Talent Training Report" indicated that 65% of the surveyed enterprises said they think fresh graduates don't have professional identity, which reflects the actual deficiencies of values education^[5]. So, the traditional "skills education" model also has to evolve to "skills education and value shaping" is an inevitable trend that needs to be explored and solved for higher vocational hotel management education facing challenges and turning to "new formats" of the industry.

2. Limitations of the traditional skill-based education model

2.1 Skill-Oriented Educational Philosophy and the Marginalization of Humanistic Cultivation

Some higher vocational education institutions label hotel management as a "labor-exporting subject" because of their one-sided thinking, which focuses on skills instead of professional qualities. The rigid core indicators that drive talent cultivation are employment rate and job matching. With the advent of mass skill replication, the comprehensive quality cultivation of skills has been abandoned as the core teaching paradigm, and the humanistic nature of the hotel service industry has always been ignored. The talent needs of the industry have evolved from focusing on a single competence to integrated development of knowledge, ability, and professional qualities, as indicated by a 2025 study by the China Hotel Association^[5]. In this digital transformation era, enterprises now demand digital hard skills from their employees, such as CRM & PMS, as well as strengthening their soft skills, such as professional identity, responsibility, service awareness, teamwork, professional ethics, etc. Comprising both hard and soft attributes, it has now become a necessity in the industry.

2.2 Polarized Curriculum Structure and Fragmented Values Education

In the prevailing education model of hotel management, it is easy to see that there are two serious issues: one is that the hotel management curriculum is imbalanced, and the other is that the issues of value cultivation have become the main constraint in the promotion of value cultivation in the field of hotel management education. The curriculum design of higher vocational hotel management courses at present is polarized. The traditional practical courses have redundant and repetitive content that is based on old knowledge of services, and the latest content, such as digital operations, international reception, and property management system maintenance, lags behind. In the meantime, there has been a gradual decrease in class hours for courses of a value-oriented nature, such as service ethics, professional qualities, and service psychology. The content of the courses is not relevant to any hotel context, and theoretical lectures that are not meaningful for quality immersion are empty. Moreover, there is no integration between professional courses and values education. This shallow "fragmented" and "superficial" understanding of quality cultivation makes the realization of holistic education extremely challenging.

2.3 Rigid and Outdated Teaching Models Inhibiting Student Initiative

There are curriculum gaps, and the teaching model is old-fashioned, which further causes educational imbalance. The rigid and imitative model of practical training is easy to suppress the innovative thinking of students and their autonomous value formation ability. Service actions and reception phrases are uniform and fixed for all scenarios, and students' individual attempts at service are often overlooked by teachers. However, in today's service world, a variety of cultural backgrounds, consumer needs, and guest types are the norm. There can be no single, rigid service template that encompasses this variety. Continuous mechanical and repetitive training breeds intellectual laziness, slows down

independent thinking and service-handling skills, and makes it difficult for personal values of service to be cultivated.

2.4 Flaws in Assessment and Absence of Value Evaluation Indicators

The regulatory "baton" that guides educational outcomes is assessment and evaluation. The current assessment system is structurally inadequate and feeds into outdated models of teaching. As far as content is concerned, only the skills and theoretical knowledge of a professional are discussed. There are no soft value indicators like professional identity, cross-cultural tolerance, teamwork, and service empathy. As for subject matter, full-time on-campus teachers assume all the assessment work, and various evaluators, including industry mentors, hotel officers, and foreign guests, have long been excluded from assessment. Concerning methods, the summative final exam has a clear value, while dynamic evaluations, which could reflect student growth, are systematically ignored. This unreasonable orientation makes students pay too close attention to skill acquisition and thus further exacerbates the lack of balance between skills and professional qualities.

2.5 Weak Career Development and Stable High Talent Turnover

The drawbacks of the traditional skill-based education model ultimately manifest at the level of industry talent development, leading to high turnover. The root cause of high hotel industry turnover traces directly back to the instrumentalist, single-faceted traditional education model. The shortcomings of the traditional talent training model are finally reflected in industry talent cultivation. Finally, the shortcomings of the traditional talent training model are reflected in industry talent cultivation, and high turnover occurs. The high turnover rate in the hotel industry has a direct connection with the "instrumentalist single-facet education model." A lack of values education will not enable students to correctly understand the social value of the service industry from a student growth perspective. This creates a constant feeling of professional inadequacy and self-deprecation, low job stress resistance, and high susceptibility to burnout after long-term service at the grassroots. If grassroots practitioners acquire only nuts and bolts skills, they have limited opportunities to move up to positions like customer relationship management and store operations management, and are easily replaceable in the hospitality industry. Not only is there a high turnover rate, which wastes good vocational education resources, but it is also seriously hindering the long-term sustainable development of the accommodation industry.

3. Pathways for Hotel Management Talent Cultivation Reform under the Value-Shaping Orientation

Basic employment qualifications could be determined by practical skills, while professional value qualities determine the ceiling of career development of graduates. Hence, it is becoming an inevitable route to talent supply-demand matching and connotative change of the discipline to build a synergistic cultivation system of "skills training and value shaping".

3.1 Reshaping the Educational Philosophy and Establishing the Goal of Integrating Virtue and Skills

The first step to solving the imbalance between skill and value cultivation and finishing off the transformation is to renew the top-level educational philosophy. High-quality vocational colleges around the world are slowly giving up the utilitarian attitude focusing on employment indicators, in favour of a people-oriented attitude that incorporates values and skills. It is high time that some higher vocational hotel management education programs changed their antiquated "skill training" paradigm and adopted a new concept of "skill cultivation as a basis and values as an embodiment". Higher vocational colleges should all foster the integration of skill teaching and value-shaping responsibilities for teachers, eliminate students' disdain for service work, and increase teachers' professional pride and industry belonging. This newly adopted collective ideology can bring an ideological guarantee to the professional teaching of integrating value qualities and lay the foundation for the cultivation of compound hotel talents.

3.2 Optimize the Curriculum System and Create a Bidirectional Integrated Curriculum Matrix

The key vehicle for the integration of skills training and value shaping is optimization of the curriculum system. In accordance with the needs for curriculum reform in China, the higher vocational colleges should overcome the traditional compartmentalization of general education courses and professional education courses. They should, on the one hand, introduce general education courses like foreign-related service ethics, cross-cultural communication, and international service etiquette to broaden students' knowledge base in the humanities. On the other hand, they should introduce general education courses such as cross-cultural communication, foreign-related service ethics, and international service etiquette to broaden the humanities knowledge base of students. Conversely, they must continuously enhance their core professional courses, remove unnecessary and obsolete practical elements, and incorporate state-of-the-art information like digital operations, guest management, and cross-border guest reception. They should also have a deep understanding of quality elements and value-shaping resources in courses and design differentiated elective modules according to various accommodation formats to form an integrated curriculum matrix.

3.3 Innovation of teaching methods and setting up immersive value-cultivation scenarios

The building of a curriculum system should be accompanied by a suitable teaching model. In the process of quality cultivation, the higher vocational hotel management programs should gradually abandon the traditional and single imitative demonstration teaching model and implement multi-model teaching, such as situational simulation, project-based teaching, and in-depth integration of industry and education. Teachers can choose to create complex and diverse training scenarios by selecting typical cases like complaint handling in international high-end hotels, cross-cultural service, and emergency rescue. Higher vocational colleges can join with international hotel companies like Hilton, Intercontinental, and Marriott to establish work-study alternating training bases and let students learn their overall abilities in the real working environment. Through team projects, they can organize foreign-related marketing, themed banquets, and public welfare volunteer services to comprehensively train students' collaborative ability, social responsibility, and construct an immersive training system.

3.4 Reforming the Evaluation Mechanism and Establishing a Diversified Dynamic Assessment System

In addition, the assessment and evaluation system should also be adjusted to ensure proper implementation of the educational philosophy and curriculum reform. It is evident that internationally advanced vocational colleges have been using multi-stakeholder, multi-dimensional comprehensive evaluation for a long time by adding soft indicators like professional qualities, teamwork, and cultural tolerance. These experiences can be valuable to some higher vocational colleges. They are able to create a four-dimensional evaluation system that includes practical skills, professional values, international adaptability, and overall development potential. They should widen the breadth of subjects to be evaluated, incorporating four sources: full-time teachers on campus, senior industry mentors, front-line service guests, and peer student assessment. They should enhance the weight of process assessment, lessen the weightage of final examinations, and set up a normalized growth feedback mechanism so as to have students' quality deficiencies precisely addressed.

3.5 Faculty Development and the development of Dual-Qualified, Dual-Educator Teaching Teams

Teachers are the main force for implementing the teaching of the curriculum and value cultivation. The establishment of a high-quality dual-qualified teaching team is the most basic assurance to ensure the success of the value-oriented education model in the long run. The requirements for hotel management program teachers should be determined by the general requirements of mature vocational education systems around the world and the Ministry of Education reform policy on improving the skill level of teachers in vocational education. Hotel management program teachers should have both practical skills in the industry and the ability to inculcate professional values in students, and they should be able to gain experience in the field or go to enterprises to participate in practical training. Higher vocational colleges need

to further improve their faculty development systems. They should regularly arrange full-time teachers for training or take short-term jobs in international hotel chains to help them get used to using digital technology and to be introduced to the most up-to-date standards of training in the industry. On the other hand, they should carry out specialized training in professional ethics and comprehensive qualities to enhance teachers' professional level in talent cultivation. Concurrently, the number of part-time, off-campus teachers should be increased, with hotel executives, industry experts, consultants, and master craftsmen all teaching on campus. This will establish a composite pattern of faculty education with a synergy between internal and external and two-way collaborative participation.

4. Conclusion

The two great transformations of digitization and internationalization are compelling higher vocational hotel management programs to change their educational logic to the core. This development from the replication of single skills to the cultivation of “skills training and value shaping” is not only an inevitable choice of reacting to the global vocational education reform and adapting to the employment requirements of the modern accommodation industry but also the main path for students to break through their career bottlenecks and for the discipline to be connotatively upgraded. Higher vocational hotel management education should carry out the coordination and integration of the key teaching resources of the program, curriculum, faculty, and practical teaching based on vocational education teaching reform. Through the five aspects of educational philosophy, curriculum system, teaching models, evaluation mechanisms, and faculty development, they need to take collaborative efforts with an aim of establishing a modern collaborative education system suitable for the digital intelligence era and solving the critical issues of the tourism industry, including high talent turnover and talent supply-demand mismatch.

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