

Protection of Internship Rights of Students in Private Vocational Colleges and Universities from the Perspective of Industry–Education Integration: Issues and Strategies

Yu Fengjiao, Wu Can, Wang Kangmei

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, Hainan 530700, China

Abstract: From the perspective of industry–education integration, this paper systematically analyzes the current situation and causes of the protection of internship rights of students in private vocational colleges and universities, and explores strategies for protecting these rights. Based on the above study, interns from private vocational colleges are at a higher risk of rights violations; that is to say, there are structural problems in the supply and demand for internship positions, weak protection of labour remuneration rights, obvious loopholes in occupational safety guarantees, difficulty in ensuring working hours and rest rights, and a structural lack of development rights. Based on the above analysis, four types of protective measures will be taken: strengthen the institutional guarantee system, optimise the school–enterprise cooperation mechanism, enhance the rights protection capacity of students, and boost the strength of the multi–channel supervision network. To provide an educational foundation and a path for implementing the rights of interns in private vocational colleges, to protect their rights and interests effectively, and to advance the healthy development of industry–education cooperation.

Keywords: Industry–Education Integration; Private Colleges and Universities; Internship Rights; Legal Rights and Interests

0. Introduction

With the deep progress of the "National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan", industry–education integration has become one of the main ways to achieve high–quality development of vocational education in China. Industry–education integration is the basic school–running model and essential feature of vocational education ^[1]. In line with the country's promotion of industry–education integration, the number of interns from private vocational colleges has been increasing at an annual rate of about 7.8% ^[2]. As shown in the *Annual Report of Vocational Education Quality*, the proportion of rights infringements for interns from private vocational colleges (43.6%) is relatively high compared with that for interns from public institutions (28.9%) ^[3], and this may be due to weak implementation of industry–education integration at the institutional level. As the first link in the connection between industry and education, internships are to help students apply what they have learned in class to gain some experience. Nevertheless, according to surveys, problems in the protection of students' internship rights have been increasing gradually. Over 65 per cent of the students in the private vocational colleges have experienced problems of rights infringement during their internships ^[4]. These problems may affect the internship results and experiences of students, and thus inhibit the healthy development of vocational education, harm the quality of talent cultivation, and restrict the continuous development of industry–education integration. Based on the above, this paper will focus on the internship rights issues of students in private vocational colleges under the background of industry–education integration, analyze the reasons for these problems, and put forward corresponding protection strategies to offer some references for improving China's vocational education internship management system and the mechanism for protecting the internship rights of students in private vocational colleges.

1. Current Situation and Practical Dilemmas of Internship Rights for Students in Private Vocational Colleges

1.1 Prominent Structural Contradiction in Internship Position Supply and Demand

Survey data shows that only 42.3% of students in private vocational colleges can obtain internship positions related to their majors. In popular fields such as information technology and modern service industries, only 39.2% of professional interns are engaged in technical positions, while 61% are assigned to low-skill work like data annotation^[5]. Some enterprises assign interns to simple, repetitive tasks unrelated to their majors, severely deviating from the teaching objectives of the internship.

1.2 Insufficient Protection of Labor Remuneration Rights

Data from a 2023 survey indicates that the median hourly wage for interns in private vocational colleges (12.5 yuan) is only 31% of that for regular employees, and 37.2% experience delayed payment of remuneration^[6]. In emerging fields like live-streaming e-commerce, 52.8% of interns encounter "performance-based pay traps," where companies deduct agreed-upon pay under the pretext of not meeting data targets^[7]. Among manufacturing majors, 28% have experienced delayed salary payments^[8]. More concerning, 15.7% of interns in service-related majors are required to pay "internship management fees," a form of disguised charging that severely infringes upon student rights^[9].

1.3 Obvious Loopholes in Occupational Safety Guarantees

Statistics show that only 39.2% of internship units purchase work-related injury insurance for students from private vocational colleges^[10]. In the manufacturing sector, 43% of internship units still lack intelligent safety monitoring equipment^[11], while new types of risks are more prominent in the digital economy sector. For instance, students majoring in Big Data at a certain vocational college were forced to grant access to their personal social media accounts during internships, leading to the commercial use of their private data^[12].

1.4 Difficulty in Guaranteeing Working Hours and Rest Rights

Data from internships in industries like catering and tourism reveals that 83.5% of students work over 48 hours per week, and 24% have experienced mandatory overtime without overtime pay^[13]. Students majoring in Hotel Management reported frequently working until late at night during internships without any night shift subsidies from the company^[14].

1.5 Structural Deprivation of Development Rights

24.7% of the students surveyed did not receive any skills training at the internship [15]. Some companies do not involve interns in the main work. A student majoring in cross-border e-commerce at a private college has been doing the same repetitive order entry for the past six months and cannot advance in their career [16]. Some school-enterprise cooperation has become a "labour supply" model, and the company has used interns' time to promote its products rather than offer them technical training. Therefore, there will be no improvement in the trainees' vocational abilities.

1.6 Insufficient Depth of School-Enterprise Cooperation and Information Asymmetry

The cooperation between schools and enterprises is shallow and uneven. Most of the cooperation is in the form of a project, and there is no long-term strategic alliance. Therefore, there will be only a weak form of cooperation. Schools have not conducted extensive research on enterprises and thus have chosen cooperation projects according to their own teaching purposes rather than the actual needs of the businesses. On the other hand, the enterprises do not have a good understanding of the schools and are more inclined to be led by the schools in terms of

cooperative projects. Therefore, there will be little enthusiasm and poor results in the cooperation between schools and enterprises.

2. Analysis of the Causes of Internship Rights Issues

2.1 Lack of Institutional Guarantee at the Level of Institutions

The primary reason is that there are no laws or regulations. At present, the legal provisions of China related to student internships are scattered in various places of the *Vocational Education Law* and the *Labor Law*, without a single, systematic regulation. Most of the current clauses are only in principle, lack strong operability, and have little binding force on the internship units. There are no specific provisions that address the actual problems of internships in private vocational colleges, and thus the regulatory foundation is weak. The Labor Bureau has not carried out enough law enforcement inspections in the internship area. China has not yet established an internship rights protection system that is in line with the development of the digital economy. The Vocational Education Law (2022 Edition) only briefly refers to the management of internships^[17]. There are no leading standards for internship remuneration in local regulations, and thus the victims do not have an authority for protection of their rights.

2.2 Blurred Boundaries of School–Enterprise Rights and Responsibilities

With the background of industry–education integration, there has been no clear division of management responsibilities for interns by schools and enterprises. Most private vocational colleges do not have clear rights protection clauses in the internship agreement. Schools often fail to manage, follow up and supervise students sent to enterprises after sending them, and enterprises are more focused on economic benefits and ignore protecting the rights and responsibilities of interns during the internship. Therefore, there is no one to take care of the students' rights. Due to financial reasons, 63.8% of the school–enterprise cooperation in private colleges aim to address the issue of "labour supply"^[18]. Some companies consider the interns to be cheap labour and do not train them. As a result, the students think that the only purpose of an internship is to perform cheap service tasks and lose interest. According to an HR manager of the company, each intern can reduce the company's labour expenses by about 12,000 yuan per year^[19]. It is for profit that they seek to educate, and thus fail to meet the main purpose of student internships.

2.3 Weakness in Student Rights Protection.

Most students of private vocational colleges do not have sufficient legal knowledge and generally have weak legal literacy. When their rights are violated, most students choose to endure it or leave; only a few will make an official complaint. They are too afraid to speak up about it and thus become victims. Interns are often in a state of helplessness; they are aware that their rights have been violated but do not know how or where to pursue legal remedies. It is mainly because interns do not fall under the traditional category of "workers" nor are they strictly students, and therefore there is a legal vacuum in the protection of their rights.

2.4 Lack of Supervision and Assessment Mechanism

Another reason for the problems is the absence of effective regulations. The education department and the labour inspection office have insufficient oversight of the internship site, and the complaint path is not simple, so infringement can be corrected in time. Education departments generally only focus on the formal requirements of internship quality in their evaluations and do not pay attention to the content of rights protection. Industry associations have had little participation in setting internship standards, and the power of self–regulation by the industry has not been fully used. There is no supervision and assessment of the intern during the internship. Some companies do not have effective management of their interns and fail to provide training, clarify job descriptions or conduct performance evaluations. Without the direction, guidance and evaluation during their internship, students will be lost and unsure of themselves.

3. Ways to Safeguard Internship Rights

3.1 Perfection of the Institutional Guarantee System

It is recommended that the formulation of the *Regulations on Internships for Students in Vocational Schools* be accelerated, clarifying that the nature of internships is a "special labour relationship" and granting students corresponding labour rights. Set a reference for the salary of interns and build a mandatory internship insurance system; that is to say, enterprises must purchase work-related injury and accident insurance for all interns. A dedicated *Regulations on Student Internships* should be formulated, clarifying the nature of internships, the rights and obligations of all parties, remuneration standards, working hours, safety guarantees, and other contents. Simultaneously, an internship contract filing system should be established. A written internship agreement is an important basis for clarifying the rights and obligations between the intern and the employer and is crucial for protecting the intern's legitimate rights and interests, ensuring that a written agreement is signed and that its standardization and enforceability are guaranteed. Although the *People's Republic of China Labor Contract Law* primarily regulates formal labor relations, internships, as a special form of employment, should also refer to the principles of this law, and a written internship agreement should be signed whenever possible. The internship agreement should clearly specify terms such as internship duration, job content, working hours, internship remuneration, benefits, and labor protection.

3.2 Optimizing the School-Enterprise Collaboration Mechanism

Strengthening the school-enterprise collaboration mechanism is key. Schools and enterprises should sign detailed cooperation agreements clarifying their respective management responsibilities. Schools should establish an internship tracking and management system, regularly visiting internship units to understand student situations. Enterprises should designate specific personnel to manage interns, providing necessary training and guidance. Establish a joint school-enterprise internship assessment and evaluation mechanism, incorporating the protection of student rights into the assessment indicators. Schools need to equip full-time internship instructors, and enterprises should designate skill mentors. The industry mentor system in vocational colleges, as a new measure to deepen industry-education integration, plays a pioneering and crucial role in promoting the construction of a high-quality, professional part-time external teaching staff^[20]. Establish a joint school-enterprise assessment system, incorporating student rights protection as an important evaluation indicator, or develop an intelligent internship management platform to achieve full traceability of the internship process.

3.3 Enhancing Students' Rights Protection Capability

Improving students' ability to protect their rights cannot be ignored. Schools should integrate labor law knowledge into the curriculum and conduct pre-internship rights education. Establish a student internship rights protection committee to provide consultation and assistance services to students. Simultaneously, improve complaint and reporting mechanisms to ensure students can conveniently report problems and receive timely handling. Integrate labor law education into the compulsory curriculum and develop a case-based teaching resource library. Set up campus legal aid centers to provide professional consultation for interns. Establish an "Internship Rights Protection Officer" system, assigning one full-time rights protection counselor for every 50 interns. It is suggested to establish a rights protection platform for students in vocational schools, which can not only strengthen the protection of their internship rights but also build a "firewall" for their rights protection as they graduate and enter the workplace and establish a good employment environment in enterprises^[21]. Additionally, guide students to understand and safeguard their own labor rights. Interns should understand the employer's rules and regulations, especially clauses directly related to their own interests, such as labor remuneration, working hours, rest and vacation, and labor safety and health. If the employer violates labor laws and regulations, interns have the right to report or complain to the labor security administrative department according

to Article 9 of the *Labor Security Supervision Regulations*. Interns should also correctly handle labor disputes. According to Article 5 of the *People's Republic of China Labor Dispute Mediation and Arbitration Law*, if a labor dispute arises between an intern and the employer, they may first try negotiation; if negotiation fails, they may apply for mediation to a mediation organization; if mediation fails, they may apply for arbitration to a labor dispute arbitration committee; if dissatisfied with the arbitration award, they may file a lawsuit with the People's Court. At the same time, pay attention to evidence preservation. During dispute resolution, interns should retain relevant evidence, such as internship agreements, pay slips, work records, etc., to support their claims.

3.4 Strengthening the Diversified Supervision Network

Enhance government supervision and industry self-regulation. Educational administrative departments should establish an access system for internship units and regularly inspect internship situations. Labor inspection departments should increase penalties for infringing acts. Industry associations can formulate internship standards and promote industry self-regulation. Through the comprehensive implementation of these measures, build an all-round internship rights protection system. Construct a "Government-Industry-School-Enterprise" four-party supervision system. Education departments should establish a blacklist and whitelist system for internship units, and labor inspection departments should intensify law enforcement. Support industry associations in formulating internship standards for specific sub-sectors, conduct star-rated internship base evaluations, introduce third-party evaluation agencies, and regularly publish internship quality monitoring reports. A well-developed supervision network and standardized supervision system can provide more reliable guarantees for students during their internships and promote both schools and enterprises to operate according to regulations. Integrate the concept of "community" into the evaluation of industry-education integration in vocational education, emphasizing holism and interconnectedness, advocating equality and harmony, pursuing common value and interests, and constructing a sustainable development mechanism^[22].

4. Conclusion and Outlook

This study reveals the practical dilemmas and underlying causes of protecting internship rights for students in private vocational colleges under the background of industry-education integration, and constructs a multi-dimensional system of protection strategies. The research finds that solving internship rights issues requires breaking through the limitations of a single stakeholder. It is necessary to form a systematic solution through multiple measures, including perfecting laws, regulations, and institutional systems, clarifying the division of rights and responsibilities, strengthening educational guidance, and improving regulatory mechanisms. This will effectively enhance internship quality and protect student rights. Particularly, attention must be paid to the specific characteristics of private vocational colleges, providing targeted support in policy design. Only by continuously improving the internship rights protection mechanism can the educational value of industry-education integration be truly realized and the continuous advancement of industry-education integration work be promoted.

Future research can further explore differentiated strategies for protecting internship rights for students in different types of enterprises and different professional fields, as well as innovative models of internship management under the background of digitalization and artificial intelligence, promoting the high-quality and sustainable development of private vocational education.

Author Biography

Yu Fengjiao (1980—), female, Han nationality, born in Haikou City, Hainan Province, Associate Professor at Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Bachelor's degree. Research interests: Vocational Education, Nursing Humanities Education, Curriculum Ideology and Politics.

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