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# The Effective Paradigm for Quality Assessment in Professional Degree Graduate Student Cultivation

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**Abstract:** China's higher education system is continuously improving, and professional graduate education is rapidly developing. However, it also faces challenges in quality assessment. Due to the highly specialized and practical nature of professional graduate education, traditional evaluation paradigms no longer suffice to meet the needs of quality management in this context. This study advocates a dynamic evaluation approach that spans the entirety of professional graduate education, addressing these issues effectively. The proposed evaluation model comprises five stages: Enrollment Stage evaluation, Admission Stage assessment, Course Progression Stage evaluation, Thesis section assessment and Graduate Tracking. This multi-phase approach ensures continuous monitoring and enhances the precision and predictability of quality management. The Enrollment Stage evaluation phase rigorously assesses applicant qualifications, ensuring that admitted students possess the necessary prerequisites for success, thereby elevating the overall cohort quality. In-program assessment is a continuous process, including Admission Stage assessment, Course Progression Stage evaluation, Thesis section assessment, focusing on students' progress throughout their academic journey, allowing timely interventions and improvements where required. Pre-graduation evaluation gauges students' readiness for graduation, while post-graduation tracking evaluation monitors graduates' career trajectories, providing valuable feedback for program enhancement. Implementing this comprehensive evaluation model aligns professional graduate cultivation with the evolving needs of students, the job market, and society. It not only elevates educational quality but also strengthens the connection between academic institutions and industry requirements, contributing to more successful professional graduate cultivation outcomes. This proactive and tailored approach to quality management significantly advances the field, ensuring that China's professional graduate student cultivation continues to meet the highest standards.

**Keywords:** Professional Degree Graduate, Cultivation Quality, Culture Quality Evaluation

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## 1. Introduction

Professional graduate education plays an increasingly significant role in China's higher education system, providing an effective pathway for the cultivation of applied and practical senior specialists. However, as the demands for talent in society continue to evolve with the development of the times, changes have been made to professional graduate education. Consequently, the evaluation of the quality of education in this domain has become more prominent. To address this challenge, in September 2020, the "Opinions of the State Council Academic Degrees Committee and the Ministry of Education on Further Strictly Regulating the

Quality Management of Academic Degrees and Graduate Education" (referred to as the "Opinions" hereafter) was issued [1]. In the same year, the "Development Plan for Professional Graduate Education (2020-2025)" (referred to as the "Plan" hereafter), issued by the State Council Academic Degrees Committee and the Ministry of Education [2], emphasized the importance of strengthening the evaluation of the quality of professional graduate education. The "Opinions" require universities to establish a sound system for ensuring the quality of professional graduate education. They outline requirements related to educational objectives, curriculum design, and teaching management, while emphasizing the importance of quality assessment. The

document specifically calls for the enhancement of the evaluation mechanism for professional graduate education. In light of this policy background, this study aims to explore the construction of an effective paradigm for evaluating the quality of professional graduate education, in order to meet the practical requirements of higher education quality management and to provide practical support for the sustainable development of professional graduate education.

The evaluation of the quality of professional graduate education aims to promote continuous improvement, enhance the effectiveness of education, and develop high-level applied talents. Currently, the existing evaluation of the quality of professional graduate cultivation primarily focuses on the assessment of classroom teaching quality and the standard of degree theses, while overlooking effective management and guidance during the educational process. It lacks dynamic evaluation throughout the entire process of professional graduate education. In the process of professional master's degree student training, it is essential to effectively manage the "five gateways" of mentor-ship, curriculum instruction, professional practice, thesis research, and career development [3]. Simultaneously, there is a need to promote a stratified quality assessment of graduate education based on classification [4]. Educational evaluation reform calls for improvements in outcome assessment and the strengthening of process evaluation to achieve the goal of enhancing educational quality [5]. The evaluation of the quality of professional graduate cultivation should span the entire journey of graduate students, from enrollment and admission to course completion, thesis writing, graduation, and degree conferment. In theory, even the post-graduation development of professional graduate students can be included in the evaluation, as the quality of education should be positively correlated with subsequent development. To enhance the scientific rigor of the evaluation of professional graduate education, educational institutions must reinforce real-time dynamic assessment of key quality points throughout the entire education process. This will facilitate the establishment of an effective evaluation paradigm..

## 2. Requirements for Professional Graduate Cultivation

The primary goal of professional graduate education is to meet the demands of society for talent in specific industries and sectors. It emphasizes the cultivation of high-level applied professionals who possess outstanding comprehensive skills and specialized expertise, enabling them to engage in practical work creatively [2]. In this context, the clarity of training requirements and the orientation towards the profession become the foremost areas of concern.

### 2.1. Alignment of Training Objectives and Career Orientation

The clarity of training objectives and alignment with

career orientation are at the core of the requirements for professional graduate education. The "Opinions" and "Notice" stipulate that professional graduate education should closely align with societal and industry needs, aiming to cultivate highly specialized professionals suitable for specific occupational fields. This implies that training requirements should not only focus on students' academic proficiency but also align with the development trends and demands of specific professional domains. Emphasizing career orientation helps maintain the practical and applied nature of education, enabling students to quickly adapt and innovate within specific fields.

### 2.2. Integration of Discipline Foundation and Comprehensive Competencies

As per the provisions in the "Opinions" and "Notice," education should not only prioritize the imparting of discipline-specific knowledge but also focus on fostering students' comprehensive competencies, including professional ethics, engineering ethics, practical skills, innovation abilities, and teamwork skills. This requirement aligns with the applied nature of higher education, as the educational process should aim to equip students with both in-depth subject knowledge and interdisciplinary comprehensive competencies to adapt to complex and ever-changing professional environments.

### 2.3. Alignment of Practical Education with Societal Needs

As per the provisions in the "Opinions" and "Notice," professional graduate education should incorporate practical education components, including internships and practical projects, to enhance students' practical application abilities. This not only helps students apply theoretical knowledge to real-world tasks but also makes the educational process more aligned with societal demands, increasing students' competitiveness in their careers. The inclusion of practical education also facilitates a deep integration of students with the actual professional field, enhancing their sensitivity and adaptability to societal needs.

In summary, the requirements for professional graduate education primarily encompass the alignment of training objectives with career orientation, the integration of discipline foundation and comprehensive competencies, and the alignment of practical education with societal needs. These requirements fully reflect the trends and directions in the reform of professional graduate education and provide theoretical support and a practical foundation for the establishment of an effective quality assessment paradigm. The requirements for professional graduate education exhibit distinct characteristics of practicality and applicability, rendering traditional evaluation models inadequate to meet these needs. Constructing a quality assessment system for professional graduate education must incorporate policy guidance and development trends into its framework [6]. Therefore, there is a need to explore a more scientific, comprehensive, and effective evaluation paradigm to align

with the requirements of societal development and the reform of professional graduate education.

### 3. Development of Evaluation Paradigms at Home and Abroad

In recent years, the academic community both domestically and internationally has been increasingly focused on issues related to the quality of professional graduate cultivation and its evaluation, leading to the proposal of new evaluation paradigms and methods. Among these, the dynamic evaluation paradigm has gained significant attention. Dynamic evaluation emphasizes the assessment throughout the entire process, shifting the focus from merely evaluating students' outcomes upon graduation to assessing their growth and development during the educational journey.

Notable examples of dynamic evaluation paradigms include the National Assessment of Career and Technical Education (NACTE) in the United States [7] and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) [8]. These frameworks place a strong emphasis on tracking assessments throughout the student's entire educational experience to gain a better understanding of their academic level, vocational competencies, and comprehensive skills. The emergence of these paradigms signifies a shift in evaluation thinking towards a greater emphasis on continuous improvement and quality assurance in the educational process.

To address the unique characteristics of professional graduate education, several domestic and international universities have proposed comprehensive evaluation models that are practice-oriented. These models integrate academic performance with practical achievements, providing a holistic assessment of students' subject knowledge and professional abilities. For example, Australia's "Doctoral Education Quality Evaluation Framework" [9] explicitly incorporates continuous engagement in career or academic development training and the enhancement of relevant competencies as one of the indicators, thus providing clear criteria for evaluation. In the United States, professional graduate education emphasizes the integration of practical education with academic and vocational competencies, using diverse assessment methods such as comprehensive student assessments, internship evaluations, and graduation projects. In Canada, there is an emphasis on the clarity of training objectives, with a career-oriented approach running throughout the entire educational process, along with a focus on fostering students' comprehensive competencies. Some Chinese universities are also exploring practice-oriented evaluation methods, including comprehensive assessments and evaluations of practical project outcomes. These models aim to provide a more comprehensive and objective assessment of students' educational quality, making the evaluation process more closely aligned with actual career requirements.

In the literature review on the evaluation of the quality of professional graduate education, a consensus is evident regarding the importance and necessity of quality assessment, as well as the trend towards establishing dynamic and multidimensional evaluation systems. International experiences also offer valuable insights for professional graduate education in China. Traditional methods for assessing the quality of professional graduate education have mainly focused on static evaluation of quality key points. They have not adequately considered the growth and development of professional graduate students during the educational process and have failed to provide timely feedback. Consequently, issues and deficiencies during the educational process often go unnoticed and unaddressed. This makes it challenging for schools and educational authorities to implement targeted improvement measures, constraining the enhancement of education quality. This study delves into how to integrate international experiences with the specific circumstances in China to construct an effective quality assessment paradigm suitable for professional graduate education in the country.

### 4. Dynamic Quality Assessment of Professional Graduate Cultivation

When it comes to evaluation methods, it is important not to rigidly adhere to either qualitative or quantitative evaluation methods in isolation. Instead, the choice between qualitative and quantitative evaluation should be based on the specific needs of the evaluation process and the nature of the evaluation indicators. It's also crucial to organically combine qualitative and quantitative assessments, as this can uncover the mechanisms by which key elements in the graduate education process influence students' abilities [10]. Dynamic evaluation throughout the entire graduate education process, coupled with timely feedback and continuous improvement, is essential. This approach can enhance the scientific rigor and effectiveness of the evaluation of graduate education quality.

This evaluation paradigm requires leveraging the professional graduate education big data platform to comprehensively monitor and effectively manage the entire educational process. It places a particular focus on the interrelations and interactions among various key stages in the education process. Through data mining and analysis, it monitors critical quality points during the educational process, such as enrollment, admission, course progression, thesis development, post-graduation tracking, and instructional supervision. Specific considerations within these stages should include:

#### 4.1. Enrollment Stage

The enrollment stage serves as the initial gateway for the quality of professional graduate education and is the starting point for evaluation. At this stage, it is crucial to not only focus on students' academic achievements but also place

significant emphasis on their comprehensive qualities and professional potential. To achieve this, a model for assessing students' potential based on competency and quality should be scientifically constructed. This model can be used to evaluate the potential of students who meet admission requirements and align with enrollment criteria, providing their competency and quality information to the admissions department. Educational institutions should, based on their unique program characteristics and specializations, explore effective criteria for assessing the comprehensive qualities of professional graduate students. The admission process, which may include interviews, should be conducted fairly and scientifically to select individuals who truly possess the potential to excel in their profession. The construction of an assessment model for the potential of professional graduate students' capabilities should focus on assessing their comprehensive qualities, professional abilities, and developmental potential. This ensures that students with outstanding professional development potential are selected from the outset, thus promoting the enhancement of education quality through improved student quality at the source.

#### **4.2. Freshman Stage**

Conducting an introductory education program for professional graduate students is essential to help them swiftly transition into their new roles, adapt to and integrate into graduate life, establish their learning objectives, and develop career plans. The new student guidance is the key to helping students embark on their graduate education journey smoothly and is a crucial part of the professional graduate education process. The training topics during this stage should revolve around the training objectives of professional graduate students. The theme of this education should begin with the cultivation of ethical values and should subsequently branch out to include specialized training based on the program's direction and objectives. This may involve inviting information experts and industry specialists to provide a series of thematic presentations and career-oriented lectures to new professional graduate students. These activities can help enhance students' information literacy and professional competencies. From the very first class, it is important to consciously foster an academic atmosphere that promotes mutual learning, academic democracy, and interdisciplinary integration. This will help students develop a healthy and positive professional outlook from the outset of their graduate education.

#### **4.3. Course Progression Stage**

The course learning stage is the beginning of a professional graduate student's academic journey, marking the start of their systematic scientific research and a critical period for cultivating comprehensive qualities and enhancing professional skills. In the context of high-quality development in higher education, educational institutions responsible for professional graduate education are placing

increasing emphasis on the quality assessment of theoretical and practical course instruction. To enhance the quality of the course progression stage, several steps are crucial: First, it's essential to scientifically evaluate the rationality of the curriculum within the professional graduate education program. Second, attention should be directed towards both the "teaching" and "learning" aspects, effectively evaluating the teaching process and the students' learning process. Implementing a mutual learning approach is essential. The concept of "industry-education integration" aligns with the developmental logic of professional graduate education [11]. Cross-disciplinary integration is an objective necessity for solving increasingly complex real-world issues [12]. Several universities, such as Tongji University, have made beneficial strides in constructing courses that foster comprehensive qualities [13]. They have developed tailored education programs to meet specific needs [14], established multi-dimensional internships based on enterprise projects [15], and leveraged "platform bases" to coordinate efforts [16]. This approach has paved the way for effective cross-disciplinary graduate education [17].

##### **4.3.1. For Students**

The intrinsic motivation of graduate students plays a pivotal role in their capability development [18]. It's important to strengthen the management and assessment of professional graduate students' learning and professional practice processes. This involves conducting comprehensive evaluations based on attendance rates, participation, learning outcomes, and the development of professional skills at each stage. Additionally, enhancing career and practical training opportunities can help in employment preparation [19]. One key step is to establish a database reflecting the learning status of professional graduate students. This database would provide data on their learning and practical experiences, facilitating data mining to gain valuable insights.

##### **4.3.2. For Teachers**

To enhance the quality of education at the course progression stage, a multi-party evaluation mechanism should be implemented, which includes leadership assessment, instructional supervision assessment, peer expert assessment, teacher self-assessment, and student assessment. This mechanism should encompass all professional graduate courses across the institution, serving as a means to promote teaching excellence and support teachers' professional growth. Simultaneously, a database reflecting the teaching status of professional graduate students should be established. This database can be used for real-time monitoring of the teaching conditions in theoretical and practical courses offered to professional graduate students.

#### **4.4. Thesis Section**

To strengthen industry collaboration, it is advisable to establish joint supervisory committees that include industry mentors. These committees would consist of multiple supervisors who jointly oversee the entire process of

professional graduate student thesis development, from proposal to mid-term evaluation to final thesis writing. This approach ensures that students receive input from multiple experts, promoting rigorous thesis work. Emphasize the application-oriented nature of professional graduate theses through regular guidance and feedback. This approach helps students address issues, improve their research capabilities, and ensure that the thesis aligns with both academic standards and practical application requirements. This is in line with the practice-oriented approach to graduate education reform, promoting the integration of theory and practice [20].

Establish a mechanism for random sampling and implement double-blind reviews for professional graduate theses to ensure effective quality control in the thesis evaluation process. Develop a scientifically sound evaluation criteria system for professional graduate theses. Thesis review experts should assess the theses against these criteria. The option of delegating this process to a third-party evaluation agency can be considered to ensure fairness, impartiality, and scientific rigor in the thesis review process.

The quality management department of the graduate education institution should monitor the quality of thesis supervision provided by mentors and oversee the entire process of professional graduate thesis development, including literature review, proposal, mid-term evaluation, pre-defense, and final defense. This monitoring is essential to ensure the quality of professional graduate theses and the application of specialized knowledge throughout the process.

#### **4.5. Graduate Tracking**

The purpose of education is to provide the background process needed to successfully cope with changes taking place in society [21]. The need for graduate level Prior Learning Assessment is evident. The necessity of pre-graduate level assessment for postgraduates is evident [22]. Similarly, the employment status and career development of professional graduate students are essential aspects of quality assessment. In 2020, the State Council's Academic Degrees Committee and the Ministry of Education mandated the establishment of a dynamic feedback mechanism for industry sectors related to professional degree categories [2]. Dynamic assessment should encompass the tracking of graduates' employment status and career development. By establishing collaborations with businesses and maintaining an alumni network, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the career development of graduates. This feedback can then be used to make adjustments and improvements to the education process.

Graduate tracking can uncover common issues among graduates and provide timely feedback to the educational institution. This allows the institution to understand the weaknesses in the professional graduate education process in real-time. Consequently, the institution can update training objectives, adjust training programs, and enhance the competencies required by employers through courses, practical activities, and social practices.

#### **4.6. Teaching Supervision**

Evaluation and supervision go hand in hand and must complement each other. It is necessary to strengthen and improve the supervision of teaching throughout the entire process of professional graduate education. This includes enhancing the guidance provided by teaching supervisors and refining the quality management and monitoring system at both the university and department levels. This approach can help maximize the role of teaching supervision in regulating teaching activities, guiding graduate advisors, enhancing education quality, and promoting teaching reforms.

Highly experienced and proficient expert mentors and industry advisors can be employed to form a specialized postgraduate teaching supervision team. Operating on the principles of "supervision, inspection, quality assessment, research, and guidance," this team will establish quality standards for postgraduate education aligned with the training objectives. Using these standards as a reference, assessments will be conducted, focusing on supervising, inspecting, and guiding the key factors and crucial stages that influence postgraduate education quality. In response to identified issues within the process of training specialized postgraduates, in-depth investigations and research will be carried out, leading to the proposal of concrete improvement measures and suggestions. This approach will encourage theoretical and practical course instructors to engage in research on teaching models and designs, fostering the enhancement of mentorship and postgraduate guidance capabilities.

The specialized postgraduate teaching supervision team primarily focuses on supervising, inspecting, and guiding the various key stages involved in the process of training specialized postgraduates. These stages include the formulation of training plans, quality control points during the training process, thesis-related activities (topic selection, proposal defense, mid-term assessments, blind reviews, and thesis defense), and professional practical experiences. The team ensures rigorous and thorough checks and inspections related to teaching, which encompass elements such as the completeness and adherence to standards of training plans, course outlines, teaching calendars, examination papers, professional practice guides, and thesis documents.

### **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, to ensure the continuous improvement of the quality of professional postgraduate education, it is essential to establish a comprehensive set of quality standards to govern the entire management of the training process, making quality assessment scientifically and effectively. To achieve this goal and ensure the quality assurance of professional postgraduate education throughout the entire process, this research has proposed a more comprehensive, dynamic, and multidimensional evaluation paradigm. This paradigm not only emphasizes students' academic performance but also focuses on cultivating their professional

ethics, comprehensive competencies, and practical skills, with the aim of enhancing the quality and effectiveness of education. Through dynamic evaluation across various stages, including the admission process, training phase, thesis work, post-graduation tracking, and teaching supervision, educational institutions can gain better insights into students' development, identify issues promptly, and make improvements. Dynamic evaluation is a key approach to understanding students' holistic development, emphasizing the continuity and tracking of the assessment process. It aids in producing professional postgraduates who are better suited to meet the demands of society and possess practical competencies.

The effective paradigm for assessing the quality of professional postgraduate cultivation is an evolving and continuously improving field, yet it still faces numerous challenges in the future. Firstly, further exploration is needed to refine dynamic evaluation methods and the specific implementation of multidimensional indicators to ensure the practicality and scientific validity of the assessment system. It is also important to establish a more comprehensive evaluation system, including mechanisms for data collection, analysis, and feedback, to support the operation of dynamic assessment. Secondly, fostering collaboration among educational institutions is crucial. They should work together to explore scientifically sound, hierarchical, and domain-specific evaluation models to meet the diverse training needs across different disciplines and professions. Lastly, dynamic evaluation should be seamlessly integrated into the entire process of professional postgraduate cultivation. It should become a standard education quality monitoring and improvement mechanism, continuously elevating the quality of professional postgraduate education.

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