

Path Analysis of Enhancing Students' Ability under the Background of Local Colleges Transformation

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Abstract. Recently, the ongoing transformation and development of local colleges and universities has aroused Chinese scholar's widespread concern in Chinese society. A series of problems is present in the education of students enrolled in local undergraduate colleges and universities. These problems include teachers' conservative or traditional approach towards education, the education system's inadequate curriculum, incomplete educational cognition, and lack of career guidance for graduates, change is required in four aspects, which correspond to the four aforementioned problems. The corresponding necessary improvements include innovation of new concepts for teachers, curriculum modulization, comprehensive cognition and effective career guidance for graduates.

Introduction

The rapid beginning and development of advanced education originates from a particular social situation in China, which is a "top down" education reform conducted by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 1999, quite the opposite of the "bottom up" demand reform found in advanced education in developed countries of Europe and North America. (Wang 2011:50) According to the international criteria for the classification of the elite stage (i.e. A few people got the opportunity to go to the college) and mass stage(i.e. A great number of people got the opportunity to go to the college) , the proportion of advanced education for the "elite stage"- below 15%, while the proportion for the "stage of mass" fell between 15%-50%. American advanced education required 3 decades to develop from the "elite stage " to the "stage of mass" and Japan required a smaller, yet similar, 23 years for its development-with an average annual growth rate of 9-10%. In China, however, this development only required 3-4 years, with an average annual growth rate of more than 20 %.(Kong 2010:121) Obviously, a series of problems occur when the development of advanced education sees such a high rate of acceleration over a short period of time. However, while the rapid development of the higher education system is a large issue, even more serious is the problem of homogenization within the education system. Given China's situation, Chinese local colleges and universities have proposed to find a solution to transform and develop in order to seek a position of status equal to its competitors in the field of advanced education.

Context of local colleges and universities

In China, local undergraduate colleges and universities fall on a lower level of the advanced education system as compared to more prestigious universities. Because the teachers and teaching environment are relatively inadequate, we concentrate on the solution of increasing the number of teachers and growing the classroom environment (i.e. more classrooms and building space to meet the demands of an increasing student population) at the initial stage of the reform of advanced education. To the education system's downfall, little attention is focused on the development of

students and their overall cultivation as capable graduates, leading to the result of students acquiring skills that are disjointed with the social demand. (Wang 2011:50) This failure of the education system is directly connected to the phenomenon of graduates experiencing difficulty to secure employment. This problem has caused local colleges and universities to reconsider their adaption to and understanding of social needs. Going through the experience of the large scale “catch-up” development, schools must focus on the work of equipping students with imperative skills. At the present time of advanced education structure in China, local undergraduate college and universities are aiming at cultivating talents in students that are pertinent for all walks of life, including both technical and professional skills to solve the practical problems which are often encountered in the workplace.

Prominent problems in local colleges and universities

Due to excellent students, first-class teachers, and the good reputations found among national key universities, graduate employment is relatively simple. However, by the end of April 20th, 2010, colleges and universities in China are 1983 in total, among which general undergraduate colleges and universities are 792. Besides the "Project 985" (Project 985 is a project that was first announced by CPC General secretary and Chinese President Jiang Zemin at the 100th anniversary of Peking University on May 4, 1998 to promote the development and reputation of the Chinese higher education system by founding world-class universities in the 21st century and eponymous after the date of the announcement, May 1998, or 98/5, according to the Chinese date format.) and the "Project 211" (Project 211 is a project of National Key Universities and colleges initiated in 1995 by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, with the intent of raising the research standards of high-level universities and cultivating strategies for socio-economic development. During the first phase of the project, from 1996 to 2000, approximately US\$2.2 billion was distributed.) universities, there exists another 642 local colleges and universities. The number of local colleges and universities accounts for 81.06% of the sum total of China's general undergraduate schools. (Gu, 2011) It can be seen that the educational quality of local colleges directly affects that of advanced education in China. In the long run, the vast number of local colleges and universities in China is directly related to China's sustainable competitiveness in the world. Therefore, it is necessary to solve the existing problems in the process of the transformation and development of local colleges and universities. Transformation, defined as a breakthrough in the original inherent development model, will inevitably lead to a series of educational conflicts. Correct understanding of the problems present during the process of transformation, exploring the causes and countermeasures of regulation, and lastly solving these problems will promote the virtuous development of the advanced education in China.

Teachers' conservative approach

Education is the accumulated inherent knowledge transmitted by humans that has considerable stability. Because of the long-term stability of the knowledge, teachers naturally form a highly established or fixed method of education during the education process of student knowledge acquisition. The transformation and development of local colleges and universities have to break through the original education model to adapt to the development of school transmission models that meet the goal of talents' training. (Pan and Shi 2009) A gap exists between the conservatism of teachers and the transformation of the colleges and universities, leading to a series of education conflicts, particularly confusion among educators regarding the value of various educational methods and teaching models. At the same time, teachers' highly fixed educational methods are incapable of meeting the needs of the rapid transformation and development of universities, ultimately hindering their progress. The improvement of students' abilities heavily depends on the transformation of teachers' education models. Therefore, we must attach great importance to the education models of the educators themselves. Only through a correct guidance and appropriate adjustment of teacher

development can local undergraduate colleges and universities successfully accomplish their transformation.

Curriculum system inadequacy

The current talent training model in China is based on Bruner's structuralism curriculum theory to structuralize knowledge, and it focuses on the basic structure of the curriculum. The essence of "structural knowledge curriculum" is that regardless of the kind of curriculum, it pays attention to students' understanding of the basic structure of the curriculum, including basic principles, concepts, formulas and other theoretical knowledge of curriculum. (Yu 2014) So the curriculum orientation makes an evaluation criterion whether it has profound knowledge. However, local undergraduate colleges or universities aim at application-oriented talent cultivation to serve the local economic development. The most important task of local colleges or universities is to cultivate the application-oriented talents for the local economic development. The talents evaluation criteria have to be whether it can solve the technical problems encountered in production, construction, management and service, ect. Therefore, overemphasis on the structural and systematic curriculum is unnecessary.

Incomplete educational cognition

Education in China has its own originality. Great attention has been paid to the students' cognitive skills and examination results from elementary school to higher education, and Chinese students always put on outstanding performances at all kinds of international contests. Therefore, compared with the students of many other countries in the world, Chinese students have a good grasp of their courses. However, we stress too much cognitive skills and examination results to neglect of cultivation of communication skills and professional dedication. Successful transition from an educated to a successful employee needs not only certain cognitive skills, but also non-cognitive skills like working attitude, dedicated spirit, the spirit of innovation, etc. As the Nobel Prize laureate, Professor James Heckman proposed in his Organizational Behavior Theory, that the cultivation of non-cognitive skills is the prominent problem in the higher education.(Heckman 2003)

Lack of career guidance

Career guidance for undergraduates is a kind of educational practice whose aim is to promote the harmonious development of students in the light of personal and social needs. It mainly provides career counselling on career planning for college students, cultivate their occupational ability and help them get a good job. Because the higher education in China has been the elite education for a long time, the employment problem is not serious before 2000. However, many universities or colleges began to increase enrollment in 1999, and since then the employment problem brought to attention of experts of various circles. Therefore, most universities or colleges set up the Center for Career Guidance. The work falls far short of the standard of the Ministry of Education because the funds and staff are not in place. According to a survey from Cheung Kong Scholars Zeng Xiangquan, 21.5 percent of students are satisfied with the career guidance and only 25 percent of them expressed satisfaction. This shows that what the Career Guidance Center has done is far from satisfactory. "(Zeng 2004) At present, although most universities or colleges offer a course in Career Guidance, it did not make substantial progress because the teachers just have a superficial understanding or study of the course.

Suggestions for the ability of graduates from local colleges and universities

Improving the teaching quality of local colleges and universities could solve the problem fundamentally between social needs and the ability of graduates from the higher education. The report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out: Delivering a better job in creating employment. It poses new challenges for reform of university education. The students can improve their ability though the following ways:

Innovation of New Concepts for Teachers (Innovation of Teachers' Thinking)

Transformation is a symbol of the improvement and development of universities and colleges. Inherent thinking mode of teachers and transformation of schools are inevitable conflicts. The key to the education reform lies in the teachers who are the main part of educational reform. The success of educational reform, to a great extent, depends on the innovation of the concept and thinking of teachers. Innovation of teachers' concept mode is required by the transformation and development of local universities and colleges. Innovation of Teacher's Thinking mode allows them to take the initiative to understand, to accept and to lead the transformation of education instead of adapting it passively. Ability of students has been promoted from teachers' method of transformation.

Modulization of Curriculum

In the 1960s and 1970s, Europe and the United States experienced the transformation in colleges and universities in order to adapt to the rapid development of economy. Many advanced colleges and universities like Polytechnic Institutes in Britain, Community and Technical College in America, University of Applied Sciences in Germany emerged to train application-oriented talents. These advanced colleges and universities have the obvious features that all have carried on curriculum reform, mainly in using modular curricula instead using subject-centered curricula. (Yu 2014) Modulization is the reorganization of curricula according to the job requirements in the practice of education, no longer emphasizing completeness and systematization of knowledge but paying more attention to the comprehensive application of knowledge and ability to solve the actual problem. It is more targeted and flexible. Graduates in colleges and universities get the skills that required for jobs by the modulized curriculum. Combination of curriculum with actual work benefits the graduates from school education to employment successfully.

Incomplete Education Conception

Advanced institutions are not only important places where human spread culture and knowledge, but are also bases for cultivating specialized senior personnel. Their development is not only subject to different stages of economic development, different political and cultural background, but also to the developing rules of advanced education. During the past thirty years in China, advanced education is mainly a kind of selective education. That is to say, the developing mode of advanced education in China overemphasized on the particularity in its own situation without following general rule of the development of advanced education. Nowadays, with the development of post-massification of higher education and the increase of its audience, it is more necessary and urgent to expand the scale of professional education and train more skilled and applied talents. We not only need to pay attention to the students' cognitive skills in the field of education but also can not ignore the students' non-cognitive skills in the overall development process.

Effective career guidance for graduates

Colleges and universities put employment guidance on important position during its reform and practice. For example, not only the school focused on employment of college students, which is also the responsibility shared by the whole society. As an employment service model, "Munich employment model" has conducted all-around cooperation in the field of university, corporate and labor bureau, which closely connect university education with job market. While in the United States where there is the most developed education all over the world, all colleges and universities have set employment guidance services, managed by specific people who is usually a vice president in charge of leadership and supervision. Employment guidance services in colleges and universities are at such a core position that will naturally increase the input of funds from American colleges and universities. Exactly, the funding is a prerequisite for normal operation and adoption of advanced information of the employment guidance services. Japan's education takes the lead in Asia, and Japan attaches great importance to employment guidance work of university, this is because graduates' employment quality determines the reputation of the college and enrollment. For example, Kyoto University of Foreign Studies had more than 4000 students, among whom 571 students graduated in 2003. There are more than 10 staff members who work on employment guidance there. In addition, employment

Committee composed by 28 people turns to employment guidance whose careful work is worth learning. (Zeng 2004)The students are the main body of employment, so there are many factors that affect employment, such as/including individual educational background, individual job-hunting ability, psychological vulnerability, personal goals of employment and self-worth of graduates. Therefore, the employment guidance in colleges and universities should help students have a all-round view of themselves and improve themselves to meet the needs of the market and society better.

Conclusion

With the development of social economy and new situation of the reform of advanced education, the country focus on improving the ability of graduates and put it as a livelihood project. Local undergraduate colleges and universities, as a place for training of application-oriented talents for local economic and social development, must change the concept of traditional education, change training mode for talents. Only by deepening the education reform can we improve the quality of talents cultivation. To this end, we should speed up the establishment and improvement of the long-term mechanism of personnel training to improve the ability of college students fundamentally and achieve a comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development of higher education.

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