

## Difficulties and Countermeasures in the Teaching Management of Free Normal Graduates for the Professional Master's Degree of Education in China

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### Abstract

At present, the cultivation of free normal graduates for the professional master's degree of education in China is in the stage of exploration and practice. Therefore, there appear some problems in the process of cultivation and teaching management, adversely affecting the quality of cultivation. This paper analyzes the problems and their causes in the course of teaching management and summarizes them mainly in the following aspects: First, students' being relatively dispersed leaves management inconvenience of time and space; second, the contradiction between work and study leaves little time to study; third, part of the free normal masters pay little attention to study and lack learning initiatives. Based on the above aspects, this paper proposes the following countermeasures: First, monitoring and evaluation should be strengthened to consummate the management system; second, informationalization of management should be accelerated to ease the inconvenience of time and space; third, multi-participation should be involved to improve the efficiency of management; four, the guidance of individuals should be strengthened to improve their self-awareness.

**Key words:** Free normal masters of education; Teaching management; Difficulties; Countermeasures; Professional master's degree

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### INTRODUCTION

In the first half of 2015, the thesis defense of first free normal masters in the six normal universities directly under the Ministry of Education in China has been completed, which marks the completion of a full round of "Enrollment—Cultivation—Graduation" cultivation mode of free normal masters. As a group of in-service masters, free normal masters' cultivation has distinctive characteristics in spite of a lot in common with other groups in terms of teaching management. In the process of cultivation, each cultivation unit has continually been exploring and providing valuable experience for the cultivation and teaching management of free normal masters in the future. Meanwhile, some problems have been brought forward, among which the most urgent one is concerned with teaching management. Taking the free normal masters in Southwest University of China as objects of our study, this paper makes a preliminary analysis of the problems and causes in the teaching management of free normal masters based on surveys and interviews, and proposes countermeasures by taking real situations into consideration.

### 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF THE CULTIVATION OF FREE NORMAL MASTERS OF EDUCATION

In 2010, to further improve the teacher' level of basic education and consummate the cultivation system of free normal graduates for the professional master's

degree of education, the *Ministry of Education in China promulgated Implementation Measures for Free Normal Graduates to Apply for the Professional Master's Degree of Education in the Six Normal Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education in China (Provisional)* (Teacher [2010] No.3). It set the provisions that from the year 2012 on, Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Northeast Normal University, Central China Normal University, Shaanxi Normal University and Southwest University will enroll graduates from the six normal universities who have been teaching in primary and secondary schools as master students of education to support normal graduates' continuing education and professional development based on teaching practice. Free normal graduates can apply for the professional master's degree of education without taking an entrance examination on the condition that they have been teaching in primary and secondary schools for one year. Applicants should first pass the assessment test organized by the schools they work in and then can be enrolled by universities according to their assessment results, undergraduate academic records and comprehensive performance. If they get full course credits, complete the compulsory courses and pass the dissertation defense, they will receive graduation certificates and diplomas of professional masters of education (The Ministry of Education in China, 2010).

Like other in-service master students, free normal masters study as students while working as teachers. Courses are mainly conducted through network distance

education and intensive class teaching in spring and summer vacations. The difference lies in the fact that the latter employs a new system of cultivation mode worked out together by the six normal universities, local government, local normal universities and primary and secondary schools. In addition, the system of "double supervisors" supported by the six normal universities and primary and secondary schools is exploited to cultivate free normal masters. The cultivation of free normal graduates for the professional master's degree of education reflects the strategic thinking in promoting reform and development of teacher education in China and is an important act which "further attaches importance to education and teachers, making education the most respected career in the whole society", and "encourages more outstanding young teachers to be lifelong educators" (The Ministry of Education in China, 2010). This unique degree is designed to enable free normal graduates to get advanced pedagogy, a good sense of vocational morality and innovation, a solid foundation of professional knowledge, a strong ability to reflect teaching practice through high-level professional training, which can lay a solid foundation for the future growth of outstanding teachers and educators. Until August 31<sup>st</sup> in 2015, the six normal universities directly under the Ministry of Education in China have enrolled 39,225 free normal master students of education, among whom 2,986 students have successfully graduated with a professional master's degree of education. Detailed data can be found in the table below:

**Table 1**  
**The Enrollment and Graduation of Free Normal Graduates for the Professional Master's Degree of Education**  
**(unit: Person)**

University	Beijing Normal University	East China Normal University	Northeast Normal University	Central China Normal University	Shaanxi Normal University	Southwest University
Enrollment number	2380	3933	5504	7542	9703	10163
Graduation number	264	444	664	551	402	661

Note. The data were collected by August, 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

## 2. DIFFICULTIES IN THE TEACHING MANAGEMENT PROCESS

### 2.1 The Inconvenience of Time and Space in Teaching Management

Free normal masters differ greatly from full-time masters in the learning and cultivation mode. The former only spend the first summer vacation at school, leaving little time for teaching secretaries to communicate with them face to face, which brings great challenges to teaching management. Generally, six universities have to attend to the cultivation of full-time postgraduate students and professional masters. Therefore, cultivation units do not put professional staffs in charge of free normal masters but assign part-time teaching secretaries. Besides, the

management of course' submission and thesis proposals cannot be carried out as smoothly as that of full-time masters. Teaching secretaries suffer heavily from these tasks and responsibilities.

Since free normal masters only spend one summer vacation at school, it is impossible for teaching secretaries to organize a group of highly efficient and executive student cadres, such as postgraduate student unions, student party branches and other student organizations. Thus, teaching secretaries can hardly set up a convenient and efficient information network of "teaching secretaries – postgraduate student cadres-monitors—dormitory leaders—students" to achieve autonomous management of students, resulting in the problem that information cannot be conveyed efficiently for notices cannot be sent

in time to inform every single student and the amount and reliability of information vary. In addition, there are too many students in Tencent QQ group and other online communication softwares and they often talk too much and spread unreal messages, causing unnecessary troubles. Even in places where some free normal masters work, network is underdeveloped and emergent notifications will be missed or delayed.

Besides, free normal masters do not live in the student dormitories like full-time masters, that is, they cannot form a united group. Once receiving important notices, one will not be able to share them with other students immediately. Free normal masters scatter all over the country, so they are unable to get to know each other's learning process. Lacking external stimulation and competitive forces, some of them form bad learning habits and bring troubles to teach management.

## 2.2 The Contradiction Between Work and Study

Free normal masters have the other identity as primary and secondary school teachers and they are quite busy with daily work. Most of them are head teachers and lesson planning leaders, namely the nucleus staffs in their schools. In addition to classroom teaching, they also have to take part in collective lesson planning, class management, and trade union activities. In China, most middle schools have set morning and evening self-study lessons which require teachers to be present. As a result, many middle school teachers work more than 10 hours a day with some of them working even more than 13 hours, so their study time is very limited after work.

As a matter of fact, girls constitute the majority of the free normal masters. During the period of studying for a professional master's degree of education, most of them are fitted for marriage and giving birth to children. In their eyes, weddings and giving birth to children are more important than study. After getting married and giving birth to children, their families, work and study contradict more obvious when facing heavy teaching tasks and all kinds of household chores. Therefore, some students make a hurry to finish their thesis writing before the submission deadline, making the quality of theses unsatisfying. And an interesting phenomenon appeared in the thesis defense of free normal masters in College of International Studies in Southwest University in the spring in 2015 that a lot of free normal masters carry babies or bear babies accompanied by their family members to attend their thesis defense.

## 2.3 The Lack of Learning Initiatives

As the state's requirements of the level of basic education teachers are becoming increasingly demanding, basic education teaching staffs are aware of the importance and urgency of improving their professional level through high-level study. However, there are still some students whose learning objectives are not clear and learning

motivations are not enough, so they lack enthusiasm and autonomy. The vast majority of free normal masters are frontline teachers in primary and secondary schools, so they have to make detailed arrangements for their students who lack autonomy enthusiasm and autonomy in the long-term teaching practice. They have been used to this kind of environment for such a long time that they unconsciously form the thinking mode of "waiting, relying, asking", that is "waiting for notifications from training units, relying on the guidance of supervisors and asking for help. However, this kind of thinking mode is most forbidden in the cultivation of postgraduate students. Such differences could directly lead to the failure in the cultivation of free normal masters. Due to the absence of them at school, free normal masters have little communication with fellow students supervised by the same supervisor. They just waited passively for notifications from teaching secretaries and supervisors, which makes it easy for them to be lazy and only wait for the diplomas without hard work.

The enrollment of free normal masters is much easier than full-time masters for the latter must pass the entrance examinations with most of them spending days and nights on preparation. Without competitions and restricted policies, free normal masters only need to complete a simple online registration with submission of applications, summaries of teaching practice and other related materials within the specified time, then they can receive admission notices from universities. In addition, free normal masters will return to the schools they worked in after graduation. They will not suffer from unemployment pressure compared to other types of masters, therefore, whether they do well in their study does not matter to them. In addition, the cultivation of free normal masters is flexible which can last three to five years. If anything special happens to students, they can also apply to retain their status as a student, delay admission or suspend schooling. That is to say, the policies of admission, suspension and employment of free normal masters are undemanding. In such a relaxed environment, some bad phenomena appear, such as suspending schooling, not submitting course papers on time, not selecting courses in the system, not completing online learning, and so on. Moreover, there are no mechanisms of scholarships, titles of honor, chances of practice, and graduation appraisals for free normal masters to compete for. The only opportunity of competition is the selection of excellent graduation theses, which is often neglected due to the limitation of quota and lack of actual benefits. It is said that part of schools and education bureaus implements policy of reimbursing full or partial tuition fees. Judging from the above facts, free normal masters attach little importance to their graduation as postgraduate students since they can easily get enrolled with tuition fees paid and without fierce competition between fellow students.

### 3. COUNTERMEASURES OF IMPROVING EFFICIENCY OF TEACHING MANAGEMENT

Concerned with a series of problems occurring in the teaching management in the cultivation of free normal masters, and through many investigation this paper has proposed that the efficiency of managing free normal masters can be improved from the following aspects:

#### 3.1 Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation

According to process management theory, a complete set of efficient management mechanism and authoritative management system should be set based on stated goals of organizational development to ensure that the organization can determinedly carry out regulations and systems of organizational management, so that the efficiency of the organization can be maximized as long as everyone can collaborate with each other collectively (Qin, 2002). Namely, a complete set of regulations and systems are the foremost factor in the process management. Free normal masters are valuable education talents of the country, so the cultivation units should formulate and implement strict management regulations and systems to guarantee the cultivation quality and play the important role of assessment, guidance, correction and encouragement in the whole process of management. On the one hand, the establishment of strict management regulations and systems to monitor each cultivation link can provide rules for the arrangement and process of teaching management to abide by; on the other hand, it can also play a role in supervising and encouraging teaching secretaries.

Strict regulations and schedules as well as the supervision and evaluation standards can set specifications and constraints for students. Take the submission of course papers as an example, schools should make strict rules and regulations and schedules and inform them in advance. Once their course papers are not qualified or are not submitted in time, they shall receive disciplinary punishments. As to those who don't submit course papers in time, teaching secretaries will strictly close all the submission channels without giving a second chance, which can prevent the students from delaying and urge them to pressure them.

#### 3.2 Accelerating the Informationalization of Teaching Management

The informationalization of education management should act as the technical support in the process of managing free normal masters. The informationalization of education is a systemic project, which means in all aspects of education and management, by means of modern information technology, the modernization of education should be accelerated by taking in-depth development and extensive use of information resources

as the focus and the cultivation of innovative talents to adapt to the information society as the purpose (Li, 2004). As to the long-time absence of free normal masters and the inconvenience of time and space in teaching management, the cultivation units should make full use of modern information technology, especially the new media technology to improve the efficiency of the management of free normal masters by combining the actual situation of free normal masters. Each training unit should accelerate the informationalization of management to achieve a whole process of electronic management "enrollment - registration - teaching plans' formulation- students' data input—intensive class learning-online learning- supervisors allocation—course papers' submission-thesis proposals-graduation theses' submission-thesis defense' application" through the establishment of specialized "management information system for free normal masters". As an important management platform, the management information system in college of international studies in Southwest University has been put into use, including student status management, electronic records management, and cultivation process management, aiming to allow students to receive timely notifications and download remote profiles, which can guarantee ordering and normalized teaching management.

In addition, the cultivation units should make full use of new media to build a platform for all kinds of network communication, notifications, and information distribution. Tencent QQ groups, WeChat groups, instant messages, and WeChat public platform make it convenient for teaching secretaries to release the latest notifications, contact free normal masters and share files in shared network regions. As the expansion of internet into modern people's life, it will greatly reduce the pressure of teaching management by means of the convenient and fast network communication tools.

#### 3.3 Improving the Efficiency of Management

Free normal masters are such a newborn, huge and special group that they need specialized staffs in charge of the teaching management. Considering that part-time management staffs are too busy with the management of full-time masters to deal with free normal masters, arrangement of specialized teaching secretaries can ensure strict management of free normal masters in all aspects, including monitoring each link in the cultivation process to realize timely notifications and reflections and implementing effective management so as to promote the cultivation quality of free normal masters.

As was mentioned, the system "double supervisors" should be made full use of to improve the efficiency of teaching management. Supervisors mainly consist of intramural supervisors who are devoted to the academic researches of education and extramural supervisors who have rich teaching experience as middle school master



teachers and senior teachers. And advantages of the latter should be realized to the fullest to strengthen teaching management and promote the cultivation since they are experienced in teaching practice and closer to free normal masters.

Lastly, those who served as teaching secretaries' assistants, grade leaders, monitors, group leaders and other student cadres in their undergraduate life should be organized to establish a large student cadre system to help convey information more effectively and improve the efficiency of teaching management because of their familiarity with management.

### 3.4 Strengthening the Guidance of Individuals

To promote the cultivation quality of free normal masters is one important measure of strengthening the construction of teaching staffs, and is also the objective requirement for the broader career development prospects so as to improve their academic achievements and professional quality when faced with increasing competitions.

When part of free normal masters are not clear about learning goals or lack learning motivations, the cultivation units should take their characteristics into account and focus on strengthening guidance in enrollment education and intensive training to make learning goals clear. Through a series of rewards and punishment mechanism, they can stimulate students' learning motivations to guide and inspire them to make efforts in realizing the training objectives and help them make individual learning plans and objectives. In this way, students will develop a sense of responsibility as a leading role in basic education, improve the ability of self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, self-regulation, self-monitoring and self-evaluation and actively cooperate with teaching

management. Then the cultivation quality of free normal masters can truly be improved.

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## CONCLUSION

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The cultivation of free normal education masters for the professional master's degree of education is a new policy which needs constantly improving and completing through practice. With the increase of free normal masters' enrollment scale and gradual researches of the education of free normal masters, the cultivation units have been continually discovering problems in the teaching management and seeking timely solutions that if the teaching management can be normalized, then the efficiency of teaching management can be improved. In the end, the cultivation quality of free normal masters will be promoted.

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