

Comparing the Role of Independent Quality Assurance System for Chinese and British Higher Education: Curriculum Standards and Monitoring Confusion

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Abstract

The curriculum of higher education is designed to reflect the overall objectives and process of university talents cultivation, and curriculum is also the ground for cultivating talents. The monitoring of the construction and implementation of the curriculum standards of Chinese and foreign universities is the starting point and the basis of the third party supervision and evaluation on the school work. Compared with the curriculum standards of Chinese and British curriculum standards, process and evaluation mechanism, China curriculum quality standard monitoring faces many problems. The curriculum quality standards are not in accordance with the personnel training objectives in curriculum of Chinese higher education, its outline structure conflict with its form, and also, the goals to be achieved and requirements are not specific enough. When using the existing curriculum standards to check or evaluate curriculum, the “third party” supervision often encounters the embarrassing situation of what curriculum standards is in the process. The “third party” power can help to improve the curriculum construction, evaluation and quality control. The establishment and improvement of the “third party” power of colleges and universities become the key to solve the problems and confusion in teaching quality monitoring.

Key words: Third party; University; Curriculum standard; Evaluation; Supervision.

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching supervision system of Chinese higher education is widely recognized as the independent “third party” in the educational field. This is an important part of the quality assurance of teaching in Chinese colleges and universities. It is the original teaching quality monitoring mechanism in China. Its purpose is to supervise, inspect and guide the daily operation of the teaching process. The university curriculum is the general regulation of the goals and processes for cultivating all kinds of higher education talents. And university curriculum is the basis for colleges and universities to implement the cultivation of talents from all directions. The supervision that the supervision institutions carry out on the implementation of the curriculum standards of the university is the main working content of the third party, and this kind of supervision is also the starting point of universities’ work and the foundation for monitoring. At present, Chinese universities, especially the new undergraduate course standards lack curriculum standards, and this makes the internal monitor mechanism of supervision go into an embarrassing point. British universities have a more complete mechanism for monitoring the quality of teaching, and making comparison between Chinese and British higher education has significance in improving Chinese university curriculum standards and quality control.

1. THE CONSTRUCTION AND MONITORING OF UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM STANDARDS IN CHINA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

The curriculum standard is the specific description given by the nation on the outcome that appears after the students complete a certain education stage. It is the concrete target that the national education quality should reach in the certain education stage and it carries with some legal nature. Therefore, the curriculum is the basis of university teaching supervision and management, and it is also the foundation for textbook compilation, teaching, evaluation and examination proposition.

The university curriculum standard is the basic component of teaching quality. Curriculum is a planned process for teaching a certain subject with purpose, which includes not only the teaching content, teaching hours and arrangements of teaching orders, but also the necessary requirements for student development in knowledge, ability and morality, etc. Curriculum goal is the basis of curriculum arrangement, curriculum implementation and curriculum content structure compilation. The standard refers to a unified regulation of repetitive things or concepts. It is common compliance guidelines and basis which is based on the comprehensive results of science and technology and practical experience. The standard is firstly negotiated and approved by the relevant authority, then issued in a specific form. (Note: GB39.5.1 “standard technical basic terms”) At this point, the development of curriculum standards is the core stage of higher education curriculum reform.

In some major developed western countries, based on the compiling of curriculum standard and through the implementation or application of the standard, a systematic change is caused in the field of fundamental education (Craft, 1999; Luxon & Peelo, 2009; Philips, 2000; Wyse & Torrance, 2009). The quality monitoring, as an important part of supervision, is gaining great attention in England. So far, England has established a systematic, comprehensive and operational quality monitoring system to provide accurate, comprehensive reference for the British government to develop curriculum standards (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Yorke, 2003). British university teaching quality monitoring mainly depends on the third party to supervise and guide. The third party uses a neutral position, independent institutions to evaluate or monitor the quality of British higher education, and this point is an important factor which makes the British higher university first-class all over the world.

The main contents of the curriculum requirements made by China’s Ministry of education mainly include: (a) education target: like the education thought, the renewal of education notion. (b) content of education or teaching activities: like the curriculum system, the reform

of teaching contents and teaching methods. (c) textbook construction: the construction of textbooks, teaching materials and the condition of experiment and practice. (d) evaluation method: like the rationalization of the structure of teaching staff, improvement of teaching ability and the reform evaluation methods

The 2013 (No.10) document issued by the Higher Education Division of Ministry of Education makes summary for the undergraduate teaching assessment with five kinds of degree: Universities’ orientation and talent cultivation goals’ adaptation degree to the national and regional economic and social development needs, guarantee degree of teachers and teaching resources, the effectiveness degree of the operation of teaching and quality guarantee system of teaching, the achieved degree of teaching effect to the cultivation goal; the satisfaction degree of students and employer company. The five degrees mentioned above are the focus of the Ministry of Education on undergraduate teaching evaluation. The curriculum quality standard is the basic factor to measure the quality of teaching in colleges and universities. Quality and development degree of curriculum standard and its implementation results is an important part and the main ground of teaching inspection, teaching assessment and monitoring, and it is also an important symbol for the quality of curriculum construction. In comparison, the certification and teaching quality system of Chinese university curriculum standards lacks this independent, unofficial third party monitoring organization.

2. THE BASIS AND QUALITY EVALUATION OF COMPILING THE CURRICULUM STANDARDS IN CHINA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

Curriculum standard reveals the basic requirements that students in different stages are expected to meet in such aspects as knowledge and skills, process and methods, emotional attitude and values. The curriculum standard also regulates the nature, objectives, content framework of the course, and correspondingly puts forward suggestions on teaching and evaluation (Guan & Meng, 2007).

The curriculum goal is determined by the specifications and objectives of national talents cultivating, meanwhile, it is also based on the concrete objectives of talents cultivation of each university and the training aims of a certain subject or major.

Since the resumption of university entrance examination, our country has issued a series of policy documents related to the curriculum of higher education, which plays an important part in the regulation of the university curriculum reform and the improvement on the construction quality of university curriculum. In 2012, the Education Ministry issued a document entitled the

Technical Requirements for the Construction of National Excellent Resource Sharing Courses. This document proposed detailed technical standards for the technical requirements of resource construction, and based on this point, provinces and municipalities also formulate the specific standards for the construction of excellent courses accordingly.

At present colleges and universities in our country to establish curriculum standards are mainly based on three considerations. Firstly, determine the curriculum content which is in line with the overall talents cultivation requirement of university with references to the professional standards, professional certification standards and the basic requirements of the core curriculum made by the Education Ministry or the National Teaching Guidance Committee. Secondly, determine the nature, positioning and objectives of the curriculum according to the overall objectives of the university talents cultivation and the professional talents training program. Thirdly, reform the curriculum and teaching contents based on the development trend of subject and major, and set up the curriculum criterion which reveals the practical ability and innovative ability, meanwhile, regulate the basic teaching requirements and determine the methods for evaluating curriculum.

Many school curriculum teaching quality evaluation standards include: firstly, the teaching syllabus and teaching plan; secondly, course teaching, teaching attitude, teaching content, professional level, teaching methods and teaching effect; thirdly, the examination results (test) (Ramsden, 1991; Byrne & Flood, 2003). At present, there are still some randomness and blindness in the specific formulation of Chinese universities curriculum standards. Many schools, regard curriculum standards as the teaching syllabus. In the designing process of teaching objectives, the goal of promoting the ideology, knowledge and ability, skills, emotional and other aspects development of students are ignored. Instead, the teaching objective design pay more attention on the requirements on teaching contents, teaching difficulties, teaching key points, arrangement of teaching hours and teachers' teaching methods from knowledge aspect, while the inherent nature of curriculum is ignored and the curriculum does not reveal the learner-centered notion. In the process of developing curriculum standards, students are not allowed to participate or listen to the students' suggestions. Take the University of Southampton University for example, students' views and suggestion are valued after the development of curriculum standards, the implementation process of curriculum and after the course ended. Students must be consulted if the teaching plan needs to be adjusted. If students do not agree to change the teaching plan, the school must not change.

Currently the main mode of the third party evaluation of higher education in the world mainly includes the

Social Independent Evaluation Model of the United States and the Semi-official Evaluation Model of QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) of England. The two main models share a common point that their evaluation institutions are independent of the universities and the government, meanwhile, the evaluation institutions also have a strong professional and technical nature, which means the evaluation results would be approved and received by multiple parties. At the same time, the evaluation institution has strong scientific nature, which provides reference and basis for improving the quality of teaching and scientific research in higher education and the innovation of talents training mode.

British universities have an effective evaluation method of curriculum evaluation, and the general content of evaluation includes: curriculum design, teaching content and teaching organization; teaching, learning and examination; students' learning progress and achievement; student learning supportive services and guidance; learning resources; and the quality guarantee and improvement mechanism (Laughlin & Broadbent, 1996; Watmough, Taylor, & Garden, 2006; Roxburgh et al., 2008). When various colleges in the British universities developing teaching syllabus, student representatives also participate in the establishment of QAA (Assurance Agency quality) guidance outline. This outline mainly consists of three parts: (a) teaching standard; (b) teaching quality standard; (c) higher education information regulation. The QAA will set up the expected standard value for each part, and below each standard the specific instructions for the specific implementation of the standard are listed. The supervisory organization which is composed of the representatives of the various colleges and the student union in each university will establish assessment criteria which consult the QAA guidelines. The supervision group of general university has three subgroups, and each subgroup is responsible for the different quality control. The first subgroup is the group to develop foreign cooperation rules, and this group reports the latest QAA standard like the University Supervision Organization, carries out the quality control of cooperative institutions on the annual report for each subject and each professional, also, it provides quality control standards and recommendations, encourages each school to share with each other the implementation of the policy as the supervision group of the university. The Vice Principals who are responsible for the international department, directors of school international office, deans of school quality supervision, the school leaders and the chairman of student union will generally be responsible for this subgroup. The second subgroup is the external research degree committee, they are mainly responsible for the making admission standards of research degree (Research Master and Doctoral students), supervision and guidance of the progress and assessment of students to ensure the

quality of teaching, guidance and the student experience to achieve the regulatory standards set up by the school and QAA and then give timely report on these issues to the university supervision group. The third subgroup is the student enrollment group, whose main tasks are: Supervise whether the university students enrollment is proper; develop higher education admissions standards through the analysis of market trend, and provide suggestions on policy making and improvement to the vice presidents who are in charge of teaching, supervise and guide the school enrollment information as well as the admission situation of each school; make sure that the admissions standards and procedures of every major are reasonable and consistent; supervise and guide the formulation of international student language requirements; assist in promoting the school code conduct and sum up experience. It is the systematic standards and the integrity of monitoring system for evaluating teaching quality in the UK that ensures the improvement of teaching quality.

In addition to the QAA, business schools in the UK can also apply for the third-party certification of AACSB (International Association of Higher Business Schools). AACSB certification mainly monitors and guides teaching from four aspects: (a) Decision management and innovation. According to the regulation of AACSB, university must have a clear strategic goal. The school's policies, academic contributions and financial standards should be set around the specific objectives of the strategic objectives to set specific working standards. (b) Students, faculty and teaching staff. AACSB certification has specific regulation on the admissions standards, and the school has a clear standard of student training standards. Schools are required to support and help students to improve their professional skills, and require many sufficient qualified teachers. (c) Teaching and student learning: check the criterion for professional knowledge to ensure that the university teaching syllabus can encourage students take an active part in learning; the teaching syllabus should promote the mutual learning among students; provide the interaction opportunity between teachers and students; All professional courses must guarantee high quality and high consistency, especially for short courses. Rational allocation of learning time, teacher-student interaction and professional skills training time. (d) Combination of academic studies and practical application. The teaching content of business schools should be closely linked to the practical application, and this close connection must be reflected in the school's goals. AACSB certification supports the business school to actively develop experiential learning, providing business executives training, and schools should encourage the teacher-teacher interaction and teacher-student interaction.

From the comparison between Chinese and British higher education curriculum, Chinese universities mainly focus on the teacher's teaching process or links when

developing curriculum standards and teaching quality assessment. However, it rarely considers the student's learning effectiveness and rarely absorb students' idea. China also lacks third-party certification. There is a big difference in the university curriculum quality assurance system standards and monitoring integrity of curriculum development between Chinese university and Western first-class university. It is an effective measure to supervise the curriculum standards and daily teaching quality with the help of the "third party" force in the Chinese university. This measure is considered as a powerful supplement for lack of a true introduction of third-party certification. In the future, China's colleges and universities still will need improvement in curriculum standard construction in the curriculum, third independent party monitoring on teaching quality to get the track of other world-class university. In particular, Chinese higher education curriculum instruction needs promote the learner-centered notion.

3. THE PROBLEMS THAT STUDIES ON CHINESE CURRICULUM QUALITY MONITORING ARE FACING

From the system of university quality monitoring, curriculum is not only a systems of knowledge structure and knowledge function, but also a system to achieve the goal of talents cultivation. The problems that curriculum quality monitoring currently face are: What are the functions and effects of curriculum quality monitoring? What is the object of curriculum quality monitoring? What criteria should be used to judge the merits and values of the object? Who is to evaluate and evaluate the quality of the curriculum? Who is the subject of monitoring and what criteria are used to evaluate the curriculum?

(a) Many colleges and universities lack scientific evaluation indicators on the curriculum assessment and evaluation, and some schools even have assessment criteria and evaluation indicators, but they excessively pursuit of curriculum surface content.

(b) The main purpose of curriculum evaluation in colleges and universities in China seems to remain in the selection of qualified courses and teaching quality evaluation or monitoring, however, it gives little attention to the quality control mechanisms for student learning.

Quantitative evaluation is the main evaluation method adopted by most colleges and universities nowadays when implementing curriculum evaluation activities. Although the quantitative evaluation method has the advantages of being easy to operate and direct information, it can directly reflect some characteristics of the evaluation object. Its drawbacks are obvious, because the curriculum evaluation process is "only quantitative", so some contents which are difficult to quantify does not enter the evaluation range, and this will directly affect the reliability of the evaluation

results (Kang & Wang, 2010). Moreover, the evaluation takes the students' assessment on teaching as the only indicator to evaluate teachers' teaching outcome, to some extent this deed lacks fairness. British universities attach great importance to the students' evaluation on such aspects like major, curriculum, teaching and the results of students evaluation will directly affect the development of the school.

(c) Whether the courses, methods and evaluation methods developed by colleges and universities are moving towards the goal of personnel training are often not considered seriously. Many educators at the beginning are not very clear about how to break down these objectives and design courses and educational teaching activities based on objectives. They even do not know how to scientifically evaluate the situation to achieve the goal. Many of the objectives put forward by the teaching plan are not selected by some scientific procedures, and these goals are so general that it is almost impossible to determine whether the curriculum and teaching methods and evaluation of teaching objectives are consistent with the realization of teaching objectives (Wang, 2009). The problem confronting us is that courses of every major are designed and set by teachers themselves own thinking, in addition, the goal of teaching is the teacher's own choice. For example, in recent years, some of the newly established undergraduate colleges, even though the orientation is an application-oriented colleges and the training goal is to cultivate applied talents. However, when formulating specific teaching plans, teachers often overlook the school's overall talent requirements, and no one specifically breaks down the target. And some people even blindly copy the talent cultivation program of the research-based university. And teaching management departments have no time to take into account the consistency between the decomposition of the curriculum for realization of this goal and objectives, which may lead to inconsistent or even contradictory objectives of the course with the overall goals of the school and the major. In the daily work of curriculum supervision, it can be seen the form and format are not unified. Some reads "syllabus", while some reads "curriculum". The syllabus focuses more on requirements for teacher's teaching process rather than the curriculum and school talents cultivation goals and students learning requirements. This makes the university supervision group of the "third-party forces" inside the university meet difficulty when carrying out inspection and supervision. The university supervisory institution is not the educational administration function department, so it does not have the formulation and development function. Different types of curriculum quality standards are not consistent with talents cultivation objectives, and the forms of syllabus is not unified. Moreover, curriculum objectives and requirements are not specific. "Third-party" institutions often encounter embarrassment dilemma of what curriculum standards

are when they check according to the existing curriculum standards. For the British university curriculum standards, teaching quality monitoring is carried out by a third party according to professional certification standards.

4. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TEACHING QUALITY MONITORING INSTITUTIONS AND CORRESPONDING CONFUSIONS

The basic system of Chinese university teaching quality monitoring is: the basic function of the school administration office is the administrative function of quality control and the school administration office is a specialized agency to develop quality management standards with specialized management personnel, it is also the main department of university education quality monitoring. On the other hand, colleges and universities have set up teaching supervision group (room, committee), which is also called the school's "third-party power", and this third-party power is an important part of the school teaching quality monitoring system. Part of the school teaching supervision group is the school authorized quality monitoring institution. The supervising group is relatively free from the official functions institution of the university, and staff in supervision group are relatively flexible. The school supervision institutions carry out purposeful and planned supervision, inspection, evaluation and guidance to the education and teaching and service departments within the school according to the policies, regulations, talents cultivation objectives and guiding ideology of school. And the supervising group provides feedback of supervision information about education and management and then put forward their suggestions to the relevant departments, personnel and college leaders. The third party of supervision group is the school's non-authority institution, which means it only has the suggestion proposing right in supervising teaching, and it only has obligation but has no power in supervision and management, so it is in an awkward position. Besides, there are not clear cut between university supervision institution and the teaching affairs department, and the two have contradicts.

The Chinese university monitoring system of teaching quality mainly relies on the school's own supervision organization to complete the course evaluation, and lacks the link of third-party quality monitoring. From the British supervision system since its establishment, the quality of education and teaching supervision is mainly through third-party inspectors to complete. Even the British Education Standards Board is directly responsible to the Minister of Education and the Parliament, not responsible for the educational administration (Wang, 2013). College curriculum standards are mostly certified by third-party certification bodies, teaching quality supervision, evaluation are often completed by independent,

neutral “third party” institutions. China’s colleges and universities are mainly directed by the Ministry of Education Evaluation Center and the provincial teaching evaluation departments and other administrative functions department, they are both commanders and references.

The curriculum construction of Chinese colleges and universities mainly spread from three aspects. Firstly, the routine assessment of grass-roots teaching department: the courses opened by the various departments of the school are assessed by university experts, the teaching materials are assessed by students and teachers, the teaching process is assessed by the mutual assessment between teachers and or by their leaders. Secondly, special assessment: the school teaching committee, school academic committee, special course evaluation group, curriculum construction group. Thirdly, the daily routine inspection: the school “third-party forces” - Supervision Group of Experts or Evaluation Office to undertake daily assessment of the quality of the course. And this is the so-called athletes’ evaluation mechanism has limited impact on teaching quality control, some are even invalid. And teaching administration department lacks personnel to supervise their supervision effectiveness on daily teaching.

The teaching inspection of curriculum quality in colleges and universities inside often adopts methods of lectures, teaching link checks, questionnaires, seminars, and these are still the main method of teaching routine inspection. These methods are, participate the course activity, stress the evaluation of: “outsider” while ignore “insider” evaluation, and it ignores the evaluation of students and field investigations. These methods also give too much on helping the students to master the knowledge, however, they overlook the cultivation of students’ ability, and they especially lack the supervision and evaluation on students’ applied ability. The traditional curriculum evaluation method is inefficient with poor feedback, low credibility and ineffective results. Particularly, teachers are not satisfied with the action that the evaluation and supervision solely rely solely on students’ comments and suggestions on curriculum. At present, many schools have established mature operating mechanism in the curriculum evaluation, teaching supervision, teaching information system, ect. However, there are still some areas that need to be improved, such as: The quality evaluation standard is not scientific enough, lack of professional certification or field standards, the monitoring process lacks the assessment of practice teaching and quality education, the monitoring result is heavy punishment and light encouragement, neglect of the track evaluation, and the construction of quality control team needs to be strengthened. And it also lacks students’ suggestions on curriculum in the curriculum design and evaluation.

The setting of Chinese university teaching supervision system is often based on the situation of individual college

or university and lacks unified norms and guidance, let alone university supervision and regulations. As a result, problems rise like the actual operation of the system is not satisfying, the organization is not perfect, the team is unstable, the concept is lag, the method is not scientific. These problems not only hinder the function of teaching and supervision, but also affect the effectiveness of teaching supervision work (Xu, 2015). On the other hand, the monitoring “third party” of universities and colleges often have no standard and basis for evaluating curriculum quality. The supervisory authority is not the standard-setting department, and use what standards to supervise and choose the extent to which the supervisory authority is required to supervise is the current dilemma and confusion that the third independent party meet in the actual supervision work. If there is no scientific curriculum quality standards, monitoring work behavior will appear blind (Shen, 2010).

Comparing the process of standards construction of Chinese and British curriculum, drawing lessons from and absorbing the advantages of British curriculum construction plays an important role in improving the talents cultivation of Chinese universities. At present, the independent “third party” force in Chinese universities is an indispensable part of the teaching quality monitoring system and evaluation in colleges and universities. With the introduction of an independent “third party” power of the teaching supervision and in accordance with the supervision and evaluation system of world-class colleges and universities, effective Chinese universities teaching quality monitoring system can be set.

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