

The Effect of “Twice Cycle” Practice Teaching System for Economics and Management Specialty: A Case of Sichuan Agricultural University

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Abstract

Economics and management specialty are characterized with a high demand for practice, thus field work is an essential part of curriculum system. This paper takes the practical teaching of College of Economics and Management of Sichuan Agricultural University for instance, exploring its practical education system, “twice cycle”, originally created by its teaching staff and catering for the economics and management majors of civil universities. This paper expounds the necessity, the procedure and the effect of this practice teaching system, and finally puts forward recommendations for further improvement.

Key words: Universities; Practice teaching system; Economics and management specialty; Twice cycle; Combination of virtuality and reality

Economics and management specialty are the main growth points for enrollment and benefits of many types of domestic situations in current and longer period (Deng, 2010). However, it has been a common phenomenon that the practice teaching is weak in these majors (Lei, 2008), and constructs an effective system of practice teaching to be major problems with advanced (Tao, 2009). Recently, in response to this challenge, domestic colleges and universities have explored, so it is no exception in the College of Economics and Management of Sichuan Agricultural University. After several years of exploration and summary, we have created the “twice cycle” as a practice teaching system with forestry characteristics for economics and management majors in universities (Figure 1). This article will take the College of Economics and Management of Sichuan Agricultural University as an example to explain such a system.

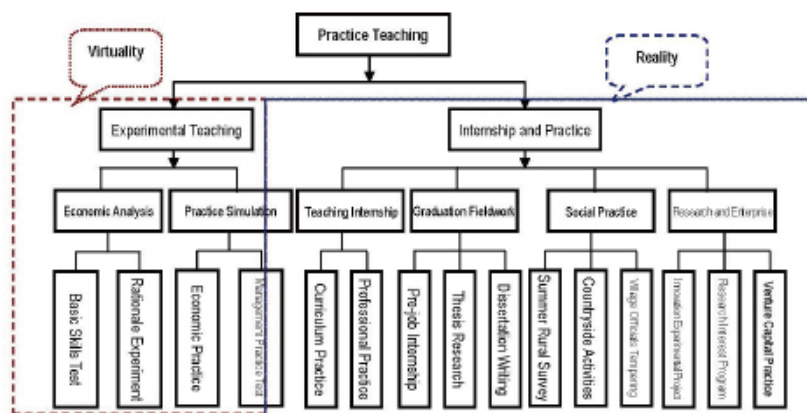


Figure 1 Practice Teaching System in College of Economics and Management of Sichuan Agricultural University

1. THE CONNOTATION OF "TWICE CYCLE" PRACTICE TEACHING SYSTEM

"Twice cycle" means school experiments and twice extracurricular practice of the "learning → application → learning" cycle process. Among them, the first cycle refers to learning theoretical knowledge in school and application in the school experiment. Insufficient learning in theoretical knowledge was found back to school again, and therefore the second cycle refers to the extracurricular practice after learning theoretical knowledge in school, and again went back to school to learn the theoretical knowledge.

"The combination of virtuality and reality" means the in-school experiments with "virtuality", that is, using the computer simulation or Virtual Lab for students to practice skills; extracurricular practice with "reality", that is to say, students go to the appropriate professional enterprises, institutions, financial institutions and government departments to do an actual work and an integrated internship, such that students administered by the agricultural university go to agriculture-related enterprises and institutions (Figure 1). The school experiments and extracurricular practice is a system that operated in the personnel training programs of economics and management majors. They are indispensable, complementing each other. The school experiments can make up the shortfall in extracurricular practice and vice versa.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "TWICE CYCLE" PRACTICE TEACHING SYSTEM

2.1 Achieving the Complementary Both in and Outside School

School virtual experiments and off-campus extracurricular practice with internships, like the two wings of a bird, are indispensable. The school experiments can make up the shortfall in extracurricular practice. At present, many enterprises and institutions in an increasingly competitive environment, in the need for confidentiality, are not willing to let the students of financial management major to contact the confidential job, which means that the virtual lab is sometimes more important than the practical. Therefore, in recent years, we have strengthened the school lab and lab hours have increased by about 100 hours to 190 hours (approximately 12.5 credits), which accounts for 6.5%, and not only the classroom experiment hours have increased, an independent economic management integrated lab class (36 hours) has also been set up. And now, to the further development of the economics comprehensive experimental and management synthesis experiment, there are two experimental courses (for a total of 72 hours) in an effort to compensate for extracurricular practice lacking challenge.

It should be noted that, although the virtual experiments in schools are useful, the opportunities of extracurricular practice are also valuable. We should not give them up easily because of the difficulties. Therefore, we have also enhanced the student practice and organized the students into the appropriate professional enterprises, financial institutions and government departments, particularly in agriculture-related enterprises, institutions, for actual operation and comprehensive practice.

2.2 Integrate Theory with Better Practice

In the experiment practice, knowledge can be deepened; ability can be sharpened; and quality can be promoted. This practice teaching system causes the theory with practice to be actually closer, combined very well the theory knowledge and the virtual lab teaching with extracurricular practice. At the same time, they complement each other, and learn from each other in the twice "learning → application → learning" of school experiment and extracurricular practices. It not only allows students to use the knowledge of school learning into practice, so that they can apply their knowledge and implement the concept of lifelong learning, but also further enhances their knowledge and ability.

2.3 Raise the Innovation Talents in Colleges and Universities with Different Characteristics

The system can be tied to the financial services, comprehensive agriculture and forestry through social practice, graduate courses, and graduation practice and other modules. For example, as an agricultural and forestry university, the economics and management majors practice teaching system of Sichuan Agricultural University pay attention to learning economic management basic skills and knowledge, comprehend the academic characteristics of agriculture and forestry, strengthen the students' knowledge and competence in the agricultural and rural areas. This is trying to meet the needs of economics and management personnel for the local economic construction, and also an effort to develop agricultural and rural business management talents. As depicted in Fig.1, the practice teaching system integrates the internal and external resources in school, both on the lab of inside and outside, trains students in managing basic knowledge, basic skills and practical training, manifests the academic characteristics of agricultural and forestry universities through experimental and social practice, enhances students' understanding and service awareness for the issues of the three problems about countryside, agriculture and farmers. In extracurricular practice, emphasis on the economic and management disciplines of the basic knowledge and skill learning through organizing students to do the relevant position practices in enterprises, financial institutions and government departments. Meanwhile, students are organized to do actual operation and comprehensive practice in

agriculture-related enterprises and institutions, by social practice (summer investigation activities, activities of the program of spreading science and technology, medical care to the farmers and the rural village official tempering), based on the characteristics of agriculture and forestry. By doing so, it is in favor of raising the innovation talented undergraduates of agriculture and forestry of economics and management.

3. THE CREATION AND MANAGEMENT IN THE “TWICE CYCLE” PRACTICE TEACHING SYSTEM OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

The creation of “twice cycle” and the “combination of virtuality and reality” practice teaching system must also consider “the combination of economics and management” (Jiang, 2007) and manifest “the characteristics of colleges and universities”. For example, the comprehensive university must manifest “the integrated development”; the finance and economics colleges and universities must manifest “the finance and economics superiority”; the technical university must manifest “the technical leadership”, and so on. Farming and forestry university must then manifest “the farming and forestry characteristic” (Jiang, 2007). Following a case of exploration of College of Economics and Management of Sichuan Agricultural University, the following are the display and descriptions of the system created.

3.1 Construct Economic and Management Experimental Teaching Platform

This experimental teaching platform refers to school-level experimental teaching demonstration center by school approval which contains four laboratories including the modern agricultural economy management, the modern management, financial and the financial control and the economic. To strengthen the leadership, by teaching assistant dean and director, there should be a full-time deputy director. The existing experimental center holds concurrent jobs specially for the union teaching, the management and more than 20 participating people. The floor space is 697 square meters. At the same time, it renews the experiment instrumentation equipment and the software unceasingly, composes the economical management class experiment teaching platform with reasonable structure and complete function. In school, the center can realize the sharing of the academic information resources, storage resources, resource input and output devices and complete the classroom experiment teaching.

3.2 Using the Simulation Technology to Construct the Experimental Teaching System and Innovative School Practice Teaching Forms

3.2.1 Use the Computer Simulation Techniques to Construct the Experimental Teaching System

With computer technology, multimedia technology and networking technology as the core of the rapid development of modern information technology, economics and management specialty in colleges and universities has an irreplaceable role to play in the field of personnel training, and has a broad development prospect (Huang, 2009). Presently, the experimental teaching system of “twice-level and four-class” has been constructed initially in College of Economics and Management of Sichuan Agricultural University: “twice-level” means fundamental experimental and advanced twice levels and “four-class” means economic analysis, management practices operation of fundamental experimental two classes, comprehensive experimental and innovative experiment of advanced experimental two classes. At the same time, the international trade practice laboratory has been constructed on 8 hypothesized laboratories. In recent years, 57 experimental project have been opened, and every year more than 3,750 people participated in the experiment, and the experimental number reaches more than 23,628 people every year. In addition, each kind of simulation laboratory holds the operation skill competition, for example, organizing the students to carry on simulation of “stock” competition in portfolio investment simulation laboratory for five sessions, the number of whom reached 1,440 people. Moreover, we also organize the students to participate in the sand table simulation competition both inside and outside the province, organize financial skills upgrading competition in schools and so on. These regard developing the students’ horizon of vision and enhancing the corresponding skills.

3.2.2 Use Innovative Artificial Scenarios to Get the Form of Innovated Practice Teaching

In recent years, the colleges through the practice of simulated auction, simulated business negotiations have not only made the form of practice teaching in innovated schools, but also have found the combination of professional education and quality education, the effect of which is significant. First, the analog auction has been conducted 14 times, and about 550 students participated in it; Second, the simulated business negotiations have been carried 11 times through the organization of the Communist Youth League, and more than 3,500 students participated. It has been expanded to be a way of training the business qualities of college students.

3.3 Building Off-campus Practice Teaching System and Platform of Economics and Management

3.3.1 Build a Four-in-One Campus Practice Teaching System

We constructed a four-in-one practical teaching system which contains “teaching internship, graduation practice, research and business practice and social practice”. The

system mainly through social practice (summer rural survey, three activities going to the countryside and village official testing exercise) reflects the characteristics of agricultural and forestry colleges to enhance students' understanding of the "three rural", develop students' feelings of the "three rural" and the consciousness of the "three rural".

3.3.2 Building an Off-Campus Practice Teaching Platform with a Combination of "Industrialization of Agriculture, Teaching and Research"

Over the past few years, the college actively established nearly 60 campus practice teaching bases, including all types of enterprises, especially the leading enterprises of large-scale agricultural industrialization, financial institutions in rural areas, agricultural departments in towns, the Provincial Association of Certified Public Accountants and urban and rural comprehensive reform pilot counties, in order to meet the general needs and the special needs of undergraduate practical teaching, with a focus on nurturing talents through the national students innovative experimental projects, schools, research institutes, training programs and undergraduate tutorial systems as well as developing a number of complex and research talents. During the past three years, through the national college students' innovative experimental projects, research interest in training programs and undergraduate tutorial system nurtured a number of integrated and research talents.

3.4 Ensure the Management Security of "Twice Cycle" and "Combination of Virtuality and Reality" Practical Teaching System

In order to make the practice teaching system to be effective, we make full use of the various aspects of school policies to establish a set of practical teaching and administrative rules and operational mechanisms.

3.4.1 Protection of Personnel Development: Stably Enhance the Diversity and Quality of Practice Teachers

Teachers are the leaders of education, and practice teaching teachers are the key to the practice teaching system implementation. Due to the backwardness of economic development and low income levels, economics and management of agriculture and forestry university teachers of the western region are generally insufficient in number and the level is not high. In recent years, our college followed the idea of relying on disciplines to build a diversified faculty: Firstly, relying on the key subjects of the 211 Project, the provincial-level key disciplines and doctoral disciplines platform, recruiting and introducing high-level teachers; secondly, sending the young teachers to the well-known universities both at home and abroad to get doctorate, post-doctoral degrees; thirdly, employing the senior managers of large enterprises to enrich the resources of teachers.

3.4.2 Enhancing the System Protection: Establish and Improve the Rules and Regulations of Practice Teaching

The university has developed a series of rules and regulations to ensure the practice of teaching, such as a series of rules and regulations of experiments and the graduation project (thesis). Experimental plans, curricular, guide books and other basic teaching documents ensure that the work is done in an orderly manner. At the same time, there is appropriate supervision and incentives to give certain economic and spiritual rewards to outstanding performance teachers and students.

3.4.3 Evaluating the System Protection: Establish and Strengthen the Scientific and Effective Assessment Mechanism

It is necessary to attach great importance to the evaluation of the effectiveness of practice teaching. There also should be emphasis on practical hands-on skills assessment. On the one hand, we established the teaching quality supervision and appraisal security system of "one group, two systems". "One group" refers to the teaching steering group which was set up by economics and management steering committee and senior teachers from the school. "Two systems" refer to the complementary of the two systems which contain "teachers' evaluation" and "students' evaluation". "Teachers' evaluation" refers to the teachers in the same department or with similar professional backgrounds giving lectures and evaluations to each other. "Students' evaluation" refers to the teaching evaluation system of students using the university educational management system online after the end of the course. Based on the evaluation, the dean of the college proposes corrective measures and improvement suggestions to individual teachers. In fact, in the assessment of practical ability, the students' experiment and practice performance assessment are more flexible, and participation in a variety of practical activities and competitions will receive the innovation credits.

4. EFFECTIVENESS AND DEFICIENCIES OF "TWICE CYCLE"

After several years of construction, practice teaching system of "twice cycle and the combination of virtuality and reality" has greatly enhanced the students' practical ability. Through participating in internal and external analog auction competition, simulated business negotiations, analog stocks competition, research interest plan, students' social practice, professional knowledge contest and other activities, students enhanced the capacity for innovation and practical ability. Consecutive years of student employment rate have been maintained at more than 90%, and the quality of employment has been increasing year by year. The effect of the practice teaching reform has been gradually revealed.

Firstly, both have knowledge of economic management and agriculture and forestry characteristics. In accordance with the new training objectives and models, the teaching is more pragmatic, paying more attention to the training of students' basic knowledge and ability. In the job market, students are not only qualified for the jobs of general economics and management, but also get the favor of agriculture-related enterprises.

Secondly, students' practical skills have got strengthened. The skills of financial management software operations, securities trading and business negotiations are getting a substantial increase. The number of students who get the qualification certificates is also increasing. For instance, there were 133 graduates of financial management major in 2009, 133 graduates who got qualification certificates and 91 graduates who got junior accountant certificate, accounting for 98.5% and 68.4% of the number of graduates. Students to participate in national and provincial competitions have obtained outstanding results. In 2011, the students of our college obtained outstanding results in the "Challenge Cup", "mathematical modeling" and the National College English competitions contests.

Thirdly, the employment rate has increased steadily. Because of the implementation of the basic course group teaching, the employment opportunities of the graduates were expanded. Because of the professional skills, the employment rate of students has been greatly improved. There were 2,841 graduates between 2005 and 2008: the number of one-time employment was 2,596 and the average employment rate was 91.4%. Compared with 2004, average employment rate increased by nearly 10 percentage points, which was higher than the provincial average level of similar professionals with remarkable results.

Although the practical teaching system we have created have achieved remarkable results, due to the influence of various factors, there are also many deficiencies: First, the concept of school practice teaching remains in the manual management of the past and the investment of funds is not sufficient to fully install the necessary equipment and software; Second, the lack of certain modules within the system; Third, the training of teachers in the practice of teaching is not enough.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE "TWICE CYCLE" PRACTICE TEACHING SYSTEM

The practice teaching system of "twice cycle and the combination of virtuality and reality" can serve the needs of different types of colleges of economics and management specialty. Meanwhile, the system itself should keep pace with the development to make further amendments to the model. Therefore, universities should continue to update the concept of practice teaching, increase the teaching funds of professional practice, accelerate the training of teachers and enhance the exploration of practice teaching system of training undergraduate creative talents with scientific research institutes.

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