

Research on the status quo and countermeasures of applied self-study assistance in Sichuan Province

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Abstract: This paper examines the main examination institutions in Sichuan Province and the current situation of applied self-study aid research. It finds that self-study aid services face the following challenges: (1) Management tools are relatively backward, and management personnel are seriously insufficient; (2) Candidates have weak foundations and poor study habits; (3) Self-study courses are difficult, resulting in a low pass rate in the unified examination; (4) The construction of learning resources lags behind, with a low level of informatization and weak relevance. Based on the current situation, this paper proposes the following suggestions to enhance the quality of applied self-study assistance: First, standardize the management process and enhance awareness of student services. Second, strengthen the construction of the student support team and improve their assisting capabilities. Third, improve the construction of online teaching resources to meet the differentiated and personalized needs of self-study candidates. Fourth, establish a supervision mechanism to fully utilize the role of supervisors.

1. Preamble

As defined in the Provisional Regulations on the Self-Study Examination for Higher Education, the Self-Study Examination for Higher Education, referred to as the Self-Study Examination, is a national examination of higher education for self-study examination participants, and is a form of higher education that combines individual self-study, social assistance, and national examination^[1]. According to the Ministry of Education's National Education Development Statistics Bulletin, as of the end of 2023, a total of close to 300 million people participated in the higher education self-study examination, training 18.53 million graduates of undergraduates and graduates of specialties^[2]. The self-study examination has cultivated a large number of talents for society, provided talent support for social and economic development, and promoted educational fairness and the improvement of the overall education level of society, as well as made great contributions to the development of the economy and society.

There are two types of higher education self-study exams: social self-study exams (large self-study exams) and applied self-study exams (small self-study exams), including two levels of specialization - undergraduate education, and three types of specialization: undergraduate education, and specialization to undergraduate education. At present, the small self-test areas include Chongqing, Sichuan, Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu, Hubei, Hainan, Gansu, Guangxi, Hunan, and

Shandong Province. Sichuan Province is the largest region that carries out small tests, where hundreds of thousands of new students apply for the examination every year (see Table 1 for details). The reason is:

Table 1 Enrollment of Sichuan Province in Self-study Examinations for Academic Education in Recent Years

Year	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Number of enrollment (10,000)	63.4	33.3	55.9	52.0	54.0	53.1

Note: Data source: Sichuan National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin^[3]

(1) Large population base, the undergraduate admission rate is relatively low: in the 2024 Sichuan college entrance examination, the total number of applicants was 835,200, ranking second in the country. The admission rate was 85.24%, while the overall undergraduate admission rate was only 26.2%, ranking at the bottom nationwide! In 2023, China's gross enrollment rate in higher education is 60.2%. In Sichuan Province, this data is 54.18%, lower than the national level.

(2) the low cost of self-study, small work-study contradiction, high social acceptance: became the first choice of students who want to improve their academic level, meet the demand for quality education, and are welcomed by the majority of students. Therefore, the current self-test in Sichuan Province is still assuming the important role of supplementary education.

(3) Self-study related policies are relatively perfect, the number of colleges and universities and the number of specialties ranked first in the country: as a self-study examination examiner work of the universities, with education and teaching, scientific research and social service functions, both in China's general higher education professional training of an important base, but also to carry out self-study examination of the main force^[4]. Examining colleges and universities dominate the self-study examination program development, textbook preparation, curriculum resource construction, daily teaching, pre-test counseling, proposing, marking, assisting students, and practical assessment, among other important aspects of the work of China's higher education self-study examination. They have played an important role in creating the cause of self-study examination, reform, and development.

2. The problems and difficulties in the development of applied self-examination

2.1 Management tools are relatively backward, and management personnel are seriously insufficient

At present, self-study basically uses the main examining institutions and off-campus study sites with a two-level management mode. The School of Continuing Education directly manages this or the school's secondary schools for macro management. Specific study process management mainly relies on secondary colleges and off-campus study sites^[5]. There is only a focus on economic benefits, ignoring the actual study aid's effect, and the work stays on the surface of the situation. Many universities and colleges have a self-study scale with the size of tens of thousands of students, but only a few management personnel face tens of even thousands of students.

The face of tens of thousands or even tens of thousands of candidates either in terms of financial aid services, or in terms of management and supervision cannot guarantee its quality.

2.2 Candidates have weak foundations and poor study habits

Higher education self-study examination is self-enrollment, with no entrance selection test, characterized by lenient entry and strict exit; participation in the self-study examination by

candidates is uneven, mainly divided into three categories: those who were delayed in obtaining higher education during the Cultural Revolution, who are mostly working people. According to statistics, in 1977, the number of applicants for the college entrance examination exceeded 10 million, with 5.7 million taking the exam, and more than 1 million students actually passing the exam^[6]. Secondly, students who wish to continue their studies in secondary colleges, technical schools, vocational colleges, and universities, as well as high school graduates who failed the college entrance examination and seek to continue their studies. Thirdly, students participating in specialized college entrance education. These candidates are generally weak in basic cultural knowledge, their learning objectives are not clear, they lack initiative to learn, and they aim to obtain a diploma to enhance their academic qualifications. The lightness of the examination situation impacts their learning. Self-study education has become somewhat challenging for them.

2.3 Self-study courses are difficult, resulting in a low pass rate in the unified examination

Part of the profession, especially in science majors, involving algebra, chemistry, and other subjects is difficult to learn. Coupled with the large number of candidates applying for the unified examination, the examination space is relatively tense. Some candidates cannot be close to the reference, resulting in the unified examination course overall pass rate being low, with the pass rate ranging from 60 to 70% for higher scores and 30 to 40% for lower scores. Additionally, some of the bottlenecks in the course have a pass rate of less than 20%.

2.4 The construction of learning resources lags behind, with a low level of informatization and weak relevance

Part of the learning content is too old; advanced science and technology, cutting-edge theories, and the latest technology are not timely reflected in the self-study examination course system. Some textbooks used are from 2011 or even as old as 2000, without updates. The construction of supporting digital learning resources for self-study candidates has been slow. The subject knowledge system basically follows the full-time training system, which is not practical and targeted, and is seriously insufficient for the cultivation of the vocational and practical abilities of self-study candidates.

3. Countermeasures to promote the development of applied self-study suggestions

3.1 Standardize the management process and enhance awareness of student services

In view of the relatively backward management means of applied self-study, the current situation of a serious shortage of management personnel, the higher authorities should strictly regulate the management mode of applied self-study, clarify the rights and responsibilities of the examining institutions (second-level colleges) and the study assistance sites, and strictly control the admission standards of the examining institutions and the study assistance sites; and formulate the minimum standards of study assistance.

3.2 Strengthen the construction of the student support team and improve their assisting capabilities

Examining institutions should strengthen the construction of the teaching assistant team with the idea of not seeking to do everything, but of seeking to be utilized according to local conditions. They should establish a professional teacher team, carefully study the key points of the syllabus and

textbooks, and regularly conduct training and counseling for the management team and teacher team of the teaching assistant sites to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching assistants.

3.3 Improve the construction of online teaching resources to meet the differentiated and personalized needs of self-study candidates

Self-examination candidates have individual differences, weak basic knowledge, poor learning habits. Information technology and digital teaching are aimed at meeting the candidates' differentiated, diversified needs to enhance their interest in learning. An effective program with specific proposals is as follows:

(1) Build an intelligent network learning self-help platform

An intelligent self-help learning platform includes learning plan development, independent learning, self-evaluation, teacher-student interaction, online assessment, performance statistics and reporting, e-learning data statistics and analysis, financial aid management, process supervision, operations management, and other functions. It can provide candidates with optimal learning guidance at a lower cost in real-time 24/7, informative records of the candidate's online learning, process assessment, and evaluation. This process also facilitates competent departments, colleges, and universities to supervise and assist learning institutions.

(2) Construct course resources that align with the cognitive level and learning habits of self-study candidates

High-quality course resources are the core of the self-study work applied. Most of the candidates for the self-test are working people or senior students. They cannot dedicate a block of time for systematic learning like full-time students. In order to meet the demand for mobile and fragmented learning, targeted construction of course resources can be carried out. This includes focusing on key points of the subjects, high-frequency testing, constructing teaching courseware, providing micro-video explanations of knowledge points as a unit, pre-test tutorials, and other course resources.

(3) Carry out the construction of a simulation question bank to improve the candidates' ability to take the examination

Examining institutions can organize industrialized teacher teams to study the textbooks and syllabus of the unified examination courses; analyze the past years' questions; summarize the important and difficult points of the examination; and complete the construction of the unified examination self-study practice question bank and pre-test question bank, which is conducive to the candidates' checking of deficiencies and testing of their learning effect. The online practice of nearly 800 sets of real questions for 89 UEC courses and more than 500 sets of simulation questions for 106 provincial examination courses has not only strengthened and consolidated what the candidates have learned, but also enhanced their ability to take the examination, so that the passing rate of the candidates has been greatly improved.

3.4 Establish a supervision mechanism to fully utilize the role of supervisors

Regularly organize self-study management and teaching staff of the teaching assistant sites to participate in training. Training content includes: student registration, online course learning progress, practice question bank, pre-test question bank progress, process assessment of usual homework and stage tests, learning process monitoring, results statistics and reporting, online learning data statistics and analysis. The study assistance points need to informatively record the online learning of self-study candidates, evaluate the process assessment of online study assistance for the candidates, so that the examining institutions can monitor and master the development of study assistance work of the study assistance organizations at any time, allowing problems to be corrected and solved in a timely manner.

4. Conclusion

Since the creation of the self-study examination system, examining schools have actively supported and promoted the development of China's self-study examination and have become the main force in self-study examination work^[7]. Examining schools play a leading and supervisory role in self-study activities involving various social forces. However, examining institutions for applied self-study in Sichuan Province face several problems, including: (1) Management tools are relatively backward, and management personnel are seriously insufficient; (2) Candidates have weak foundations and poor study habits; (3) Self-study courses are difficult, resulting in a low pass rate in the unified examination; (4) The construction of learning resources lags behind, with a low level of informatization and weak relevance.

This paper proposes the following suggestions on how to improve the quality of applied self-study assistance: First, standardize the management process and enhance awareness of student services. Second, strengthen the construction of the student support team and improve their assisting capabilities. Third, improve the construction of online teaching resources to meet the differentiated and personalized needs of self-study candidates. Fourth, establish a supervision mechanism to fully utilize the role of supervisors.

It is believed that through the implementation of these measures, self-study candidates can receive precise assistance. This will not only enable them to acquire professional knowledge and skills but also improve their examination pass rates. Meanwhile, by enhancing the management and service levels of self-study assistance, examining institutions can boost their core competitiveness and reputation, forming a virtuous cycle. This will contribute significantly to the construction of a learning society in China.

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