

Teaching Quality Assurance in For-profit Colleges and Universities: Significance, Difficulties and Solutions

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Abstract: As an important branch of classified management of colleges and universities, the healthy development of for-profit colleges and universities has become the key to the success or failure of classified management of private colleges and universities. It is also an important embodiment of the diversification of higher education choices and the reform of education system. On the basis of summarizing the basic characteristics and development status of for-profit colleges and universities, this paper analyzes the significance and difficulties of teaching quality assurance construction in for-profit colleges and universities, and puts forward solutions and countermeasures to establish and improve the teaching quality assurance system of for-profit colleges and universities from four aspects, including doing a good job of top-level design, scientifically positioning development objectives, clarifying responsibility subjects and cultivating quality culture, which is the meaningful balance between realizing the enterprise value of the company and the value of school education.

1. Introduction

Teaching quality of for-profit higher institution is widely concerned by public society. Because in traditional idea, we always consider higher education is a non-profit activity, which is completely different from profit-driven management model. In this article, taking several for-profit higher institutions in Shanghai as examples, we discuss the signification, dilemma and solutions to establish teaching quality assurance system for for-profit higher institutions.

2. Development Status of For-profit Higher Institutions in China

On 18th Jan, 2017, Ministry of Education launched the constitutional amendment of the Private Education Promotion Law of the PRC. One of the major changes is to legitimize the for-profit higher institutions. From then on, according to the new letter of this law, the private higher institutions can change their business model from non-profit to for-profit.

In the field of academic education in China, there are still few profit-making schools in the legal sense [1]. As the "newborn" after the classified management of non-state higher institutions, it is still too early to evaluate the development level of this "newborn". Therefore, the author selects Shanghai colleges and universities as the survey object to analyze the current development of Shanghai profit-making colleges and universities. Right now, there are 44 public and 20 private higher institutions in Shanghai. While, up to January 2020, 4 of these 20 private higher institutions have changed to for-profit higher institutions.

Through investigation, the development status of these several for-profit higher institutions present four characteristics. First, the new laws legitimize the rights of founders of for-profit higher institutions, and therefore stimulating the enthusiastic about running new schools in society. However, on the contrary, the teachers in these higher institutions seem to have had second thoughts about for-profit schools. To be specific, teachers in for-profit are worried that they, comparing with

non-profit, might be at a disadvantage in project application, academic title evaluation, career promotion and so on. Second, according to the new law, for-profit higher institutions are allowed to price tuition which are stickily set and controlled by government in non-profit. Furthermore, for-profit schools have more freedom and flexibility in establishing financial policy and investment plans, and therefore contributing the personal development in future. Thirdly, as for-profit higher institutions are new to the scene in China, related management system and policies are still in exploratory phase. Contrary to non-profit schools which are protected and financed by the government, non-profit school is more like company which would have to be responsible for their own profit and loss. Facing this, it is urgent to innovate concept, system and management to protect the legitimate rights and interests of teachers working in the for-profit higher institutions. fourthly, in terms of social impact, the founders of for-profit higher institutions are also concerned about the social acceptance of the schools. To be specific, when choosing a school, students and parents tend to choose non-profit schools. Because they generally believe that the teaching quality is better in non-profit schools, while non-profit schools, like companies, are just for the money.

3. Signification to Establish Teaching Quality Assurance System for For-profit Higher Institutions

In society, students and parents generally consider that for-profit higher institutions pay more attention on profit rather than teaching quality. Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable development, it is significant to establish teaching quality assurance system for for-profit higher institutions.

3.1. Increasing the Teaching Quality

Although for-profit higher institutions are responsible for their own profit and loss, they have more freedom and flexibility in conducting management and finance policies. Continual optimizing and innovating teaching management mechanism, including teaching decision-making, teaching quality target standard, organization and implementation of teaching, educational condition and guarantee, teaching supervision, etc., can eventually improve the teaching quality. Carrying out the construction of teaching quality assurance not only realizes the benefit goal of the company, but also helps to improve the teaching quality of the school. By constantly optimizing and innovating the teaching management mechanism, a teaching quality assurance system including teaching decision-making, quality objectives and standards, organization and implementation, condition support guarantee, quality monitoring and improvement is established[2].

For example, in Shanghai, from 2018, Education Bureau began to implement evaluation classification to range all colleges and universities. This evaluation classification assesses and compare school operation and management level, educational resource and condition, education quality and educational reputation & characteristic of every higher institution to supervise and improve the teaching quality. Because of the flexible teaching management mechanism, for-profit higher institutions can enhance their strengths and improve their weaknesses basing on this evaluation classification, therefore increasing teaching quality.

3.2. Promoting the Diversification of Educational Services

Regarding education service as a sort of “commodity”, developing for-profit higher institutions can be capable of meeting the diverse needs of different groups on higher education[3]. Usually, the budgets of for-profit higher institutions mostly come from tuition fees rather than government financial grant. In order to keep income and expense balance and maintain the long-term development, the tuition fee of for-profit higher institutions is certainly higher than the average level of non-profit. So when students and their parents choosing for-profit higher institutions, they would be more cautious and reasonable. In the limited number of formal educations over a lifetime, families may only choose to receive a certain type of education as long as the lifetime benefits to individuals are equal to or greater than the associated costs of receiving such education[4]. Due to the flexible educational mechanism, management mode and finance policy in for-profit higher

institutions, these schools can supply diversified education service to diversified students through innovating teaching management system and personnel training pattern, setting up first-class curriculum resources, innovating college-industry collaboration patterns, strengthening construction of teaching team, expanding international cooperation.

3.3. Promoting the reformation of education system

In China, the improvement of private education laws and regulations is in step with the the transformation of economic and social development. From 1997 to 2016, Chinese government have issued several laws and regulations, such as Non-state Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China (2018 Amendment), Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Supervision and Administration of For-profit Non-state Schools, Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Classified Registration of Non-state Schools and so on. Although these laws and regulations provide the legal basis for the development of for-profit non-state higher institutions, these schools still need to reinforce the connotation construction of education and teaching, establish and enhance the relative rules and regulations, quicken the reform of education mechanisms, increase the teaching quality, to cultivation high-quality talents in different pattern.

4. Dilemma to Establish Teaching Quality Assurance System for For-profit Higher Institutions

First, for-profit non-state higher institutions are insufficient of overall design and plan. since 2002, when Chinese government issued Non-state Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China, non-state higher vocational education has experienced rapid development in China for nearly 20 years. However, in 2016, Ministry of Education and other four departments issued Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Classified Registration of Non-state Schools. It is the first law to legalize for-profit schools. From then on, several non-state colleges applied new official licenses, changing from non-profit to for-profit in a hurry. Facing this huge revolution, these for-profit schools are still on the start-up stage. So there are a great deal with difficulties and problems about overall plan, relative rules and regulations and management system to be solved to establish teaching quality assurance system.

Second, the goals of for-profit schools is either to cultivate talents, or to pursuit profit. So the balance of profit and social responsibility is another dilemma to all for-profit higher institutions. To be specific, the objective of higher education is to cultivate senior professionals with a sense of social responsibility, innovative spirit and practical ability. While, besides of that, for-profit schools also have to pursuit profits to operate in the long run. Therefore, there is a conflict between persuading profits and training professionals. for instance, in order to increase teaching quality, for-profit schools should employ excellent teachers and enterprise professionals, improve teaching facilities and resources and so on. All of these actions will increase the costs and decrease the profits. As a result, some for-profit schools maybe decrease the inputs to teaching quality assurance system to ensure the profits.

Third, the disequilibrium of management structure is another dilemma to for-profit non-state schools. In China, the corporate governance structure of private colleges and universities is an organizational structure related to school operation and right allocation established by private colleges and universities as an independent legal entity among organizers, decision makers, managers and other stakeholders, as well as a complete set of systems such as responsibility and right division, check and balance relationship and supporting mechanism formed through this organizational structure [5]. In China, in addition to the president responsibility system, the management of non-state schools will also be restricted by the board of directors. Especially in some for-profit non-state higher institutions, the property of business will be more obvious than non-profit. The 'intervene' from the board of directors make the imbalance between academic power from president responsibility system and administrative power from the board of directors more complicated in for-profit higher institutions. Because of this imbalance, the government's role in

managing schools would be greatly diminished. Furthermore, the non-standard phenomenon in the process of school management will come into being, which is a great threat to the construction of teaching quality assurance system in for-profit non-state schools.

The last not the least, some for-profit higher institutions do not pay enough attention to teaching quality. Cultivating quality consciousness is the core and soul of the internal teaching quality assurance system in higher education.[6]. for-profit higher institutions is in the exploration stage in China. In this stage, in for-profit schools, the management system is still in pilot phase, below-average salary and welfare results in high mobility of teachers. So in the short time, it is difficult to establish teaching quality consciousness in these for-profit schools. And managers and teachers have not realized the importance of teaching quality[7]. As a consequence, formation of the teaching quality assurance system needs more time and effort.

5. Solutions to Establish Teaching Quality Assurance System for For-profit Higher Institutions

In China, due to the special historical conditions, non-state higher institutions are not as good as public colleges and universities in terms of social attention, government resource acquisition and public recognition. It is still difficult for the public to fully recognize for-profit colleges and universities in a short time. In view of this contradiction, it is indisputable that the development of any new thing must be tortuous. For-profit colleges and universities have their social space for existence and development and do not violate the law of social development. They can obtain greater vitality in the competition with other types of colleges and universities by ensuring the construction of teaching quality system and improving talent training quality.

5.1. The construction of teaching quality assurance in for-profit colleges and universities needs top-level design

Top level design is a major event related to the overall situation. At first, the construction of teaching quality assurance in for-profit colleges and universities needs to do a good job in top-level design. The teaching quality assurance system is generally a collection of multiple subsystems which are all different in functions and relevant factors. In order to design the subsystems more reasonably and effectively, we need to ensure the quality of the top-level design. In combination with orientation and characteristics, for profit colleges and universities must carefully handle the relationship between the company's operation and teaching management, the company's board of directors and the school's administrative management team, and the company's benefits and the quality of teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to refine and quantify the relevant factors affecting school teaching quality. By formulating scientific, reasonable and effective rules and regulations, we can realize the standardization, institutionalization and normalization of teaching process monitoring, and finally promote the normal operation of teaching quality assurance system.

5.2. The construction of teaching quality assurance in for-profit colleges and universities needs scientific positioning and diversified governance.

The construction of teaching quality assurance in for-profit colleges and universities needs to take the school to the correct development path through scientific goal orientation. These university should position its development objectives basing on the national policies, its own conditions and school running philosophy, and cooperate in talent training, professional disciplines, teaching staff, teaching mode and social services[8]. Among them, talent training is the top priority of quality assurance. In addition to meeting its own school running philosophy and relevant policy requirements, it also needs to be based on first-class standard in the world in terms of training characteristics. In terms of professional orientation, we can flexibly set up new majors with application value according to market demand. In terms of the construction of teaching staff, we can use the flexible financial management system to attract outstanding talents by improving salary and optimizing pay structure. In terms of teaching mode, we can carry out professional oriented teaching, deeply understand the needs of social development, pay attention to the diversification of

teaching methods, and strengthen long-term cooperation with high-quality resource enterprises. For a long time, social service has been the weak link of private colleges and universities. In the past, non-state higher institutions used to collect tuition fees to create value for the company and pursue a "short, flat and fast" profit model. In the future, for-profit colleges and universities can set social service goals to improve their social state and reputation. We can improve the reputation of the school and expand the social influence of the school through social services.

5.3. The construction of teaching quality assurance in for-profit colleges and universities needs to clarify the subject of responsibility

With the deepening of China's administrative system and economic system, it has become normal for multiple subjects to participate in the management and operation of school daily affairs, which is particularly prominent in private colleges and universities. Parents, enterprises, society and government in the external teaching environment, as well as students and teachers in the internal teaching environment can benefit from the school teaching security system. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the role and status of multiple subjects such as the administrative team and the board of directors in the composition of the school teaching quality assurance system. Under this circumstance, it is very important to absorb relevant foreign experience and combine with China's basic national conditions to create an accountability system with diversified connotation in line with the development characteristics of China's new era, and clarify the relationship between power and responsibility. Only in this way can we ensure that the responsibilities of each subject are effectively implemented and supervised.

5.4. The construction of teaching quality guarantee in profit-making colleges and universities needs to cultivate quality culture.

Non-state higher institutions, whether for profit or non-profit, are essentially institutions to cultivate high-quality talents. Contrary to the fact that the quality of talent training pays more attention to results, the construction of teaching quality assurance focuses on the whole process. To ensure the effective implementation of the whole process of teaching quality guarantee, we must cultivate quality culture. With the continuous accumulation of the realization activities of the quality assurance system of higher education, the quality assurance activities should gradually go beyond the scope of technology and evolve into a cultural phenomenon --- quality culture[9]. Whether as a company or an educational institution, for-profit colleges and universities should take the quality culture as an important part of their organizational culture and implement the quality culture into all links of school teaching quality management, such as the formulation of teaching objectives, the revision of school management system, the shaping of campus culture and the construction of school style of study.

6. Conclusion

It is commonly agreed that for-profit higher education has become an important global phenomenon, and it will continue to expand. The higher education system should be adjusted to adapt to this trend. In short, the healthy development of for-profit colleges and universities is also related to the success or failure of the classified management reform of private education in China. Therefore, for-profit colleges and universities need to pay more attention to the construction of teaching quality assurance, do a good job in the top-level design and clear objectives of teaching quality assurance, strengthen the supervision and accountability of teaching quality, and actively cultivate a quality culture with its own characteristics, Only in this way can for-profit colleges and universities cultivate excellent high-quality talents, expand social reputation, and realize the win-win situation of talent training quality and company operation efficiency.

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