Research on Educational Reform in Clothing Engineering at Colleges

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Keywords: Educational Reform, Clothing Engineering, Local Industry, Local Culture.

Abstract. China Dream is offering guidance on reform in culture, education, and supply-side upgrading of regional industries. Over 600 colleges across China are engaged in reform against this background. In order to meet the requirement for educational reform in clothing engineering, the direction, idea and path of educational reform in clothing engineering at ordinary universities are discussed. The paths to educational reform that can serve local economy, integrate with local industry and absorb local culture are studied.

1. Introduction

China’s higher education belonged to the elite education before the 1990s. The colleges in China have been merged and considerably increased its enrollment since the 21st century. After 2010, national policies were issued to instruct 600-plus ordinary colleges established from organizational merger in 2000 to shift their focus to vocational education. Currently, how to reform the standard and mass education comes to the fore. The colleges and especially the ordinary colleges should perform supply-side reform so that they can meet the market requirements and provide special education.

2. Real-world Background of Educational Reform

Driven by investment, export and consumption, China’s economy has been developing rapidly for decades. In recent years, China is in the throes of economic reform. In order to maintain a medium-speed growth, the Chinese government has devised new economic policies and decided to perform supply-side reform, paving the path to China Dream. In this context, the reform and opening-up policy have been entering a difficult stage, highlighting the needs for the higher education system to adapt itself to social and economic development. Therefore, all ordinary colleges across the country should reform themselves in stages to implement the national spirit of China Dream.

The curriculum of many ordinary colleges in China is undesirably homogeneous. How to develop unique education system that can meet future requirements is an issue that has to be considered and explored by the higher education personnel. After introducing China Dream to the cultural and educational areas, some experts and scholars have proposed various recommendations for the reform in their respective fields. This paper focuses on the reform in clothing engineering.

With continuous advances in science across the globe and especially in information technologies, various industries and markets are further segmented. In the past when the information could not be propagated quickly, the market was even favorably responsive to clothing products that were derived from copying the style of large brand with appropriate use of color and material. But nowadays, the spread of information is so fast that the earth is like a village, and new products are released every second. Therefore, the higher education system should be geared to the needs of the clothing industry. Instead of cultivating elites or employees with the lowest level of vocational qualification, the colleges should strive to supply talents equipped with technological expertise and innovation ability. The purpose is that the graduates can accommodate themselves to the market seamlessly and meet the requirements of the industrial economy. To this end, supply-side reform
should be performed on the education, and a unique educational system for clothing engineering should be established.

3. Benefit of Educational Reform to Local Economy

In the context of fierce market competition in China and across the globe, the local economies are trying to construct industrial cluster and improve industrial competitiveness. Meanwhile, while participating in the national education reform and the competition with education institutions of the same type, the colleges have similar demands for the development in homogenous disciplines. Therefore, local economies and colleges share similar development demand and direction.

The colleges can draw on local region to perform educational reform and benefit local economy at the same time. After educational reform, the college graduates are more tailored to the needs of industrial requirements and can thus play a more innovative role in upgrading local economy and industry. On the other hand, in the attempt to develop economy, the local government should prioritize education to guarantee economic sustainability. Government support can create a congenial environment for progress in college education.

Potential synergies between clothing enterprises and colleges can be fully fulfilled based on government guidance. What the enterprises have gained about the latest market trend can be integrated into the clothing curriculum so that the students can equip themselves with more practical and useful expertise. The colleges can provide enterprises with technical support for product design, thereby creating a win-win situation.

4. Integration of Educational Reform into Local Industry

Food, clothing, lodging and transport are basic necessities of mankind. According to the contents of the work, the clothing profession can be divided into clothing design, clothing plate making, clothing craft, clothing marketing and clothing decoration. This means that the clothing industry has a heavy demand for a large number of high-quality clothing talents.

Despite the considerable demand of the country, region and industry for clothing talents, many of the clothing majors switch to other professions. As a result, only a few of the students are actually engaged in the clothing industry. Careful analysis of this phenomenon indicates that the main reason is the poor ability of the students to accommodate themselves to occupational requirements. Therefore, it is imperative for colleges to reform the clothing curriculum and gear students to market needs. Otherwise, the students may well face unemployment after graduation. The clothing discipline can be reformed from the following aspects.

4.1 Reform in teaching system

The purpose of educational reform in the context of market economy is to gear the schools and students to the needs of market and market economy. The principles of reform in the clothing discipline are threefold: the schools should try to know more about the clothing enterprises, the clothing enterprises should be introduced to the teaching process, and the graduates should be channeled to the clothing enterprises.

These three principles are helpful in gaining a new understanding of interaction between learn and teach. According to the idea of the famous Chinese educator Tao Xingzhi on educational reform, innovation can occur to anyone, anytime, anywhere. Therefore, it is not true that the students must stay at class to learn. If the class is held at the clothing enterprise and workshop, the students can be exposed to the real-world scenario, where they can gain first-hand experience instead of being spoon fed at school. Moreover, the students can more easily identify what they know now, and then strive for the answer by themselves at the library. When the students start to learn and explore on their own, half of the success is at hand for the educational reform. Afterwards, it is up to the teachers to fulfill their duties. The famous Chinese educator Du Wei proposed the five-step research process, namely, feeling problems, finding problems, finding solutions, choosing the best solutions, trying, repeating trials, and drawing conclusions. His student Tao Xingzhi rephrased it into an
infinite cycle of practice, question, hypothesis, experiment, conclusion, and practice [1].

The teachers should keep these rules in mind and offer students necessary guidance rather than spoon-feed them [2] in order to improve their self-study ability. The teachers can play a dominant role only when it comes to the teaching of theories. But for the practical courses, the teachers ought to stand by and check whether the students follow the right steps. In this way, the students have more freedom to explore and more incentive to develop innovations for the clothing industry.

4.2 Reform in curriculum

The curriculum should be adapted to the needs of the clothing industry and enterprises. Segmentation of the clothing industry and the posts within the clothing enterprises impose more demands on graduates. In this context, efforts should be taken to fully unlock the potential of synergy between enterprise, school and research organization, seamlessly gearing school education to market needs. Novel, practical and unique curriculum can be constructed by deeply reforming the courses and teaching methods.

The foundation and compulsory courses for the sophomore and junior students should be as diverse as possible to ensure fairness and cater for a wide range of abilities. The teachers are supposed to spend more time on the formulation of teaching plans and the customization of course for different classes. Afterwards, the teachers should engage themselves on reflective teaching. This can help them improve professionalism and closely observe the learning of students, adjusting their courses quickly if necessary.

When it comes to the professional courses, the students can be instructed to intern at the clothing enterprises in batches. They begin with the clothing craft, followed by the marketing position in the clothing stores. All internship courses are taken under the charge of teachers. Performance evaluation is performed by the clothing enterprise personnel. The regulations that the enterprises formulate for new employees are also applied to students. The students will be tested whenever they complete the training for a post. Only when they pass all of the tests will they obtain all credits and complete this course. After they return to school, they will clarify which post is of their interest and then learn by themselves accordingly.

By following the cycles of internship at enterprise and in-depth research of theory at school for two or three times during the sophomore and junior years, the students have chances to apply what they have learned to practice under the guidance of teachers and enterprise advisers, thereby equipping themselves with more practice skills. And during this process, they sharpen their abilities to communicate and work well with members in the heterogeneous team, as well as identify, analyze and solve problems. In addition to paving the way for graduation project, these experiences get them ready for employment after graduation and enable them to be mixed with various groups quickly.

To sum up, the major objective of courses for the sophomore and junior students is to accumulate expertise and develop practical skills. This underscores the need for the curriculum to be geared to student needs. Moreover, the schools and enterprise workshops ought to complement one another, so that the students can learn as much expertise as possible during the two golden years and be well prepared for future employment in the society.

5. Absorption of Local Culture into Educational Reform

Unique clothing studio can be established to improve the innovation ability of students by learning from local culture. The more special the local culture, the more likely it is to attract the audience across the globe. Some courses on the traditional culture need to be introduced to the general education. Furthermore, the class can be taken at the site of local culture, in order to have the first hand opportunity to feel, learn and mine the local culture. After the students return to school, they can reflect on their experiences, study the origin, gain deeper understanding and more importantly, draw inspiration for clothing design.

The local culture usually involves special material, special craft, special pattern and special lifestyle. Extraction of these elements from the local culture can be designed as the last courses for
the senior student before their gradation project. Note that the graduation project should be
diplomatic and open. The outcome of gradation project can be the traditional, fashion or
anti-fashion products, which are to be pictured and released over the Internet for on-line marketing
or alternatively, sold at local clothing stores. This process requires the expertise that the students
have leaned on marketing at college. This series of intellectual and non-intellectual activities are
likely to lead students to the establishment of their own start-ups. The students are allowed to apply
to different clothing studios to finalize on their graduation thesis.

The curriculum of experimental courses is dynamic, because the teaching contents and forms
need to be accommodated to the needs of economy, market, industry and occupation. Hence, the
teachers should keep pace with the clothing industry. Constant support is expected from the school
leadership so that the teachers have more chances to gain first-hand experience from the market,
identify the latest market trends and yield insights into the design of curriculum.

6. Recommendations for Educational Reform

Educational reform in clothing engineering involves school, teacher, enterprise and student. Their
participation determines the progress in the educational reform.

6.1 Improvement in faculty professionalism

A Master’s degree is the prerequisite for qualification as a teacher in most of the colleges in
China. This qualification criterion overestimates the importance of degree without adequate
consideration of practical abilities. The chief problem of the education in clothing engineering is not
the student’s disinclination to learn or the lack of interest and skill in learn. Instead, the problem lies
in the teachers who have no idea how to change themselves, how to update the teaching contents,
how to arouse student interests at class and how to inculcate the clothing expertise into students [3].

As a result, the clothing engineering teacher is expected to be as competent as a researcher. First,
the teachers should have an in-depth understanding of the teaching contents and keep pace with the
latest development. Second, the teachers ought to keep improving their professionalism and
teaching quality and reflect on their teaching to ensure they have catered to the needs of different
classes. Finally, more efforts should be taken to perform on-the-job training to enhance the teaching
quality.

The new teacher should serve as a teaching assistant at first and work under the guidance of an
experienced teacher. The guide is responsible of familiarizing new comers with teaching objectives,
directions, methods, and the operational requirements of clothing studio. In this way, the new
teacher can grow into a qualified teacher quickly, efficiently and effectively.

6.2 Intra-school cross-discipline cooperation and development of pubic platform at the
experimental center

The separate teaching resources from enterprises and teaching organizations, as well as the
independent teachers of different disciplines in the school can be combined organically to develop
new courses that match the need of jobs [4]. Especially for the sophomore and junior students who
have returned from enterprise internship, they need knowledge of other subjects to deepen their
understanding of their future profession. At this point, a public platform can be developed for the
experimental center, which covers the traditional culture and other contents regarding general
education, quality education, aesthetic education and personality education. The experimental
center then becomes a novel and practical learning platform beneficial to comprehensive
development of students. The students can use the platform for self-study of social, cultural and any
other knowledge needed, fully unlocking their potential and preparing themselves for their career
dreams.

7. Conclusions

Externally, the educational reform of the clothing engineering discipline cannot succeed without
considerable support from local government and seamless cooperation with local enterprises. Internally, the educational reform involves the change of curriculum, the construction of competent teacher groups, and the development of a public platform for the experimental center. In this way, the school can pave the way for self-study of students, and find a balance between individual development of students and standard implementation of curriculum. More importantly, the graduates are geared to the need of enterprise and market and participate in the clothing industry competently. At the same time, the colleges accomplish their development goals and establish a special vocational training system. The human resource supplying system is improved and the local demand for talents is satisfied.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by the Humanities and Social Science Foundation of Sichuan Education Commission: Research on the inheritance and innovation of Longchang summer-cloth (Grant No. 17SB0220), and the Research Foundation of Neijiang Normal University: Research on the evolution and compiling works of Hakka clothes in Ronglong region of Sichuan (Grant No. 16JC18).

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