A Study of College Education Reform from the Perspective of Stake Holders

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Abstract. The theory of stake holders is an effective theoretical framework for analyzing. While putting this framework into the study of college education reform, we could clearly identify which would be the most significant stake holder among the education reform. Through the contract paradigm of contractual relationship, colleges, teachers and students become the parties which involved in the process of education reform, are deemed as the most significant stake holders. By identifying the stake holders of college, teachers and students, the paper discusses the interrelation and problems among the three parties and proposes the coordination mechanism to solve the problem. The paper hopes to provide a new theoretical perspective for the further study of college education reform.

1. Introduction

Since the reform and opening-up, with the deepening reform of economic system, the reform of Chinese college education has also been deepened. The theory and practice have been proposed by many scholars consecutively under the mainstream of the variety of education system, the expansion of education level, the reform of education approach and the innovation of teaching methods among the topic of college education reform. Among all these fields of reform, the reform of college education is mostly the closest in relation to our request of economic development. However, the reform of college education is not just those reforms that mentioned above, the most important thing we should focus on is the relationship between the stake holders which are involved in the reform of education. The cause of education reform is the in-adaptation and incongruity of the greatest common interests between the stake holders—colleges, teachers and students. The final task of education reform is to keep the balance between these three parties of stake holders. Therefore, the process of education reform should pay more attention to the harmony of interests between colleges, teachers and students.

2. Identification of Stake Holders in College Education Reform

Freeman (1984) firstly proposed the theory of stake holders in his great work Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach. The theory abandons the idea of maximizing the interests of shareholders, believing that the management activities of business managers should be the activities that are balanced by the interests of various stake holders, and the pursuing of enterprise should be the maximization of the overall interests of the stake holders. Similar to the enterprise, the college is the institution which extends the educational function, and the maximizing of interests should be maintained between the stake holders which being involved. However, instead of maximizing the value of capital, the interests that should be maximized are the reputation of the college and teachers, also, the students’ achievement which cannot be measured. In 2005, Hu introduced the analytical framework of stakeholders into the college education system, and he proposed that specific stake holders include administrative staffs, college professors, contributors, students and
governments [1]. On the other hand, Li believed that the college was a typical organization of stake holders, and that was the public welfare of college that made the stakeholders lose their independent control. Li also classified the stake holders of college into four types: core stake holders (teachers, students, managers), key stake holders (alumni, financial allocations), indirect stake holders (parties having the contractual relationships with college), and the marginal stake holders (local community, public) [2]. According to the classification of stake holders proposed by two scholars above, we could know that Freeman’s theory of stake holders does not specify the specific criteria of stake holders, nor does it points out how stake holders are interacting with each other. The author believes that studying the reform of college education via the theory of stake holders should firstly identify the most significant stake holders, and analyze the relationship between each other and existing problems, then put forward the specific coordination mechanism. That would be great beneficial to understand the reform of college education.

To understand and identify the most significant stake holders in the process of higher education reform, we should start from the process of production and reform of higher education. It is easy to see that the college is not only the place where the education is produced and completed, but also the place where the reform of education being proceed. The college being a legal person is the requirement for it becomes the one of the most significant stake holders in the reform of education. The two parties which involved in the production activities of education are the teachers and students. Teachers provide the service and the students receive the service in the process of production activities and reform of education. That is, the logic paradigm of colleges and universities makes teachers and students become the most important stakeholders in the reform of education.

3. Interrelation of Stake Holders in Higher Education Reform

The highest value of higher education reform lies in how to train people being all-round developed. As the starting point and destination of education reform, training people being all-round developed reasonably should be the core of education reform and be the relationship of interests which should mostly being balanced by the stake holders. However, remaining at the core position of education reform does not mean students remain at the dominance position. From the perspective of economy, students are the raw material while entering the college and the graduates that out of college are the finished goods. The process from raw material to finished goods is the production process of education. The process of optimizing education production and the process of improving the quality of finished goods actually is the process of education reform. Therefore, the students are always in the subordinate position in the process of education reform.

The production elements in economy not only include the elements of objects, but also include the elements of human beings and the elements which combined by the above two elements. Therefore, the production elements of education include not only the students which are deemed as the single element of objects, but also include the teachers as the elements of human beings and the colleges as the elements of objects which are combined by the elements of teachers and students. College is the factory in the process of education production, and the practice area for the education reform. Teachers are the workers and the pioneer for the objects of education reform. Therefore, teachers and colleges are both in the leading position in the process of education reform. Chen advocated that the college should accomplish the construction of reflective ability in the reform of education, and focused on the theoretical learning and specific observation to develop the ability of identification. Through the construction of multiple dialogue and research system, students' evaluation ability can be cultivated, and the students’ judgment ability can be trained by effective feedback and standard construction [3]. Starting from the method of education reform, Hao emphasized that the reform of contemporary education must follow the specific logic of reform and development, and it must surpass the thinking and behavior mode of reductionism, and finally, propel the whole reform system from one-dimensionality to the integrity [4]. It is impossible to talk about production process if there was no factory, and it is also impossible to talk about the process of education production if there was no college. However, the college, as the element of objects,
kept the dominant position of teachers which were deemed as the element of human beings. The college without teachers is the factory without workers and consequently, the process of education production would be shut down.

4. Problems between Stake Holders in Higher Education Reform

4.1 Problems between college and students

At present, the reform of higher education has entered into the deep-water area, the situation it faced became more complex and the new problems between students and college have continuously highlighted. First of all, the problem of students’ accumulated needs and the college’s inadequate construction are becoming increasingly prominent. College education has its own laws, although government has focused on investing in college’s hardware since the reform and opening up, it could not make up for the short-board of software. Education reform is not only the updating of college’s hardware facilities such as infrastructures, equipment etc., it is more important to accumulate college’s software such as the college’s tradition, culture and characteristics etc. [5].

Secondly, the diversity of college’s evaluation is incompatible with the goal of student’s development. The standard of college’s evaluation is various at present and it is often seen that there are a variety of rankings for universities. The index to evaluate a college has also been diversified from the single index of students’ development to the index of scientific level and enrollment quotas for postgraduates etc. This measurement of value is bound to affect the realization of students’ training target.

4.2 Problems between college and teachers

From the perspective of organizational behavior, we could have the awareness that the relationship between colleges and teachers is mainly reflected as the relationship between organization and individuals, however, the problems of the two does not surpass the scope of organizational behavior. On the one hand, as the colleges are all adherent to the characteristic path by the leading of higher education reform, and the teachers, as the backbones of college’s characteristic development, their identification makes great contribution to the success of college’s characteristic development. However, teachers have not yet formed a unified understanding and lack of confidence to the importance of college’s characteristic development, and also, they are mostly unwilling to participate in the practice of specific work. On the other hand, teacher’s self-ability also limits the process of college reform. Many college teachers are insufficient in teaching theories and technical knowledges before starting their career, and after being a teacher, combined with college’s ignorance of teaching method, teachers mostly are weak at the ability of continuous learning and the ability to grasp the latest information. This had led to the unclear orientation for the character of college teachers.

4.3 Problem between students and teachers

The teaching behavior covers the behavior of teaching by teachers as well as the behavior of learning by students and the main problem between students and teachers mainly lies in the coordination and maladjustment of teaching behavior. The reform is mainly reflected in the advanced means of education in the reform of higher education. However, the use of multi-media and PPT misinterpreted the process of teaching. Teaching should be the behavior of teachers instead of machines. The exemplary teaching should be combined with the use of technology, instead of being the opposition of each other [6]. In student’s process of learning, students mostly face up with the problem of insufficient knowledge, and the purpose of learning also remains a huge gap from the noble reason to access to the cognition world and transform the world narrow to the reason to get a decent and well-paid job. In the aspect of interests, the theory and practice are remained top-heavy among students. They mostly focus on the learning and innovation of theoretical knowledge instead of paying attention to the learning and regression of practice. Moreover, they are short at the ability of operation and the guidance of theory on practice.
5. Mutual Coordination Between Stakeholders in Higher Education Reform

5.1 Coordination between college and students

In the reform of higher education, college must pay attention to the connotative development as well as the characteristic development, and constantly improve the soft-power of college itself. Taking on own advantages, finding the breakpoint, condensing and developing the specialty should be carried out by colleges; furthermore, colleges should innovate the educating mode based on their own conditions, and stand out from many colleges. Instead of blindly focusing on innovation, college also should inherit the academic tradition and form the unique and profound culture of colleges. Therefore, the spiritual motivation would be provided to the development of colleges. As the saying goes, if you are blooming, butterflies will come to you, which is the goal of the reform of the university.

For the college, the core of higher education reform is improving the quality of education and teaching, and the only way to realize the value of college’s education service is satisfying the needs of students. First of all, a number of academic leaders in the field of characteristic specialty should be introduced for the development of students, and this would also apply the intellectual support for the development of the disciplines and specialty. Secondly, creating the atmosphere of organic combination of teachers’ scientific research activities and teaching activities. It’s a partition for both scientific research and that open up the teacher’s teaching, to guide teachers to combine their teaching activities with the research activities, and to inspire students to participate in the scientific research. The last but not least, the college should uphold the ideology of teaching and educating people, and establish a belief of taking a hundred year to rear people, constantly accumulate the culture of colleges instead of focusing on the rank.

5.2 Coordination between college and teachers

The college must attach great importance to the role of teachers in the reform of education. The education reform could only be carried out in uniting the power of reform. It is necessary to unite more teachers to participate in the reform, especially to enhance the cultural identity of teachers to the reform of higher education. Only understand the significance meaning of college’s characteristic development, the ideology of characteristic development could be internalized into their own beliefs. During the specific practice, the college should call on more teachers to participate in the process of college’s characteristic development. Teachers would gain a positive experience while devoting themselves in the specific practice of college’s characteristic development, and also their identity of college culture would be strengthened [7].

Secondly, teachers should take the initiate for learning, and maintain the spirit and belief of continuous learning. The construction of self-capacity should be strengthened by the teacher in the reform of education. On the one hand, to enhance the professional identity of teachers, the originality as being a teacher should be found, only this, the passion of work be ignited in the career road. Zhao proposed that the study of the identity of teachers is a new motivation to promote the reform of teacher’s education. The clear self-consciousness and the sense of practice and efficacy should be established by the teachers, and it is the feasible way to construct the identity of teachers [8]. To gain the self-identity, teachers who are engaged in teaching should strengthen their self-consciousness in training students. Practicing the theory, enriching the knowledge in the new circumstance of economy, acquiring the communication theory and the sense of practice and efficacy, and finally, completing the logic circulation of theory and practice. On the other hand, teachers should take the initiative to learn the new educational ideas and teaching skills, and establish the ideology of lifelong learning. At the same time, college should establish an evaluation system to teachers, and provide a great environment for learning, to ensure that teachers could enhance their awareness of being a teacher and upright their learning attitude [9]. The economic reform brought by reform and opening up has enhanced the significance of rule of economic development to the rule of teachers’ development. To measure teachers’ constantly changeable teaching activities, we must use adopt rules and methods. This mechanism is not only the verification of the regression of practice, but also the original power of teacher’s development and the theory’s innovation.
5.3 Coordination between students and teachers

The coordination between students and teachers is the most significant one among reform of education. The realization of education reform lies in the reform of teacher’s teaching and the reform of student’s learning. Firstly, the reform of teachers teaching should be in place. Teachers should balance the relationship between words and deeds and the use of technology. Nowadays, the teacher who cannot acquire how to use advanced educational methods and techniques would not be a qualified teacher. The educational methods and techniques teachers possessed should be applied to the practice and the highest level is to know it well and can manage it with ease. The educational methods and techniques played their roles through the words and deeds, and vice versa, the words and deeds are strengthened through the educational methods and techniques. Secondly, the reform of student’s learning should also be paid attention. On the one hand, students themselves should strengthen the cultivation of moral character. It is the ultimate goal of education to cultivate the self-discipline and the noble morality. The first lesson of education reform must be focused on cultivating students’ consciousness of self-discipline, which could be the teaching goal and running through the whole process of education. On the one hand, students should have the awareness of the logical circulation of practice and theory. The process of learning is mostly a process of absorbing the theoretical knowledge. The important step in education reform is to make up the shortcomings of the theory’s regression to practice in the process of education production. As President Xi’s speech in the 80th anniversary celebration of Central Party College mentioned, we should regress the learning to practice when facing the new era with limited opportunities but severe challenges. We have to learn and practice again and again.

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