Emphasizing the Dominant Position and Playing Foundation Role of Universities in Higher Education Quality Assurance

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Abstract. Facing the target of comprehensive higher education quality guarantee system, it is essential to establish a new mode that the macro-quality control by government, quality regulation by society and quality management by universities organically coordinate with each other and run smoothly. Because the quality of higher education is finally formed in the process of education activities, it is the premise of and key to the assurance of higher education quality that universities establish their own quality assurance system. Therefore, they shall actively assume the significant responsibility in higher education quality assurance, and shall, as the entity of running school, give full play to their initiative, specify the mission and target, strengthen specialty construction, carry out teaching research and development and establish, perfecting the internal education quality assurance system that universities, society and market form a virtuous circle. As to teacher dimension, it is essential to try every means to arouse the education and teaching enthusiasm of teachers. As to student dimension, it is essential to stress student-orientated, introduce the students’ perspective and highlight students’ experience and feeling. As to management dimension, it is essential to mainly play the role of system guarantee and condition guarantee.

Introduction

With the establishment and improvement of socialist market economy system and the deepening of higher education management system reform, the mode that the higher education quality was fully guaranteed by government in the past has not met the need of new situation. Accordingly, “it is essential to establish a multi-element quality assurance entity consisting of government, society and school”[1] and “establish a new mode that the macro-quality control by government, quality regulation by society and quality management by universities organically coordinate with each other and run smoothly.”[2] In this mode, it is essential to emphasize the dominant position and foundation role of universities in higher education quality assurance.

Important Role

It is the premise of and key to the assurance of higher education quality that universities establish their own quality assurance system.[3] Universities, as the only body of internal assurance of higher education quality, assume the primary responsibility for the management, control and self-assessment of their own education and teaching quality. The external assurance system of the higher education quality must be based on the internal assurance system of higher education quality.[4] Because the quality of higher education is finally formed in the process of education activities, the process assurance inside universities shall be the base and foundation of the whole higher education quality assurance system. From that perspective, the main emphasis of higher education quality assurance shall be inside universities and shall be guaranteed at the system and institution level.[5]
Through further analysis, it is easier to understand that when we are unable to formulate an accurate and scientific quality standard for quality assurance activities, people will turn to the condition assurance and training process control of talent training activities. It is assumed that when there are teaching assurance conditions and strict links of teaching activities, the talent training quality of universities can be guaranteed. That is the reason why institutional accreditation and professional accreditation are the main modes in overseas higher education quality assessment. The quality assessment reveals that schools are independent main bodies of running school, the main bodies of higher education quality assurance and the object of higher education quality accountability. Thus, the higher education quality assurance system of independent school running, self-restraint, market inspection and social accountability is formed. That is, the main emphasis of higher education quality construction is universities; the binding force is market; the market quality competition is the fundamental system and mechanism of higher education quality assurance.

Therefore, schools shall actively assume the significant responsibility in higher education quality assurance, and shall, as the entity of running school, give full play to their initiative and establish and perfect the internal education quality assurance system that schools, society and market form a virtuous circle.

Basic Work
Firstly, specify the mission and target. The mission and target of university is the positioning and the public commitment of university, the main line of internal quality assurance system construction of university and the specific embodiment of university’s implementation of autonomy in running schools. Therefore, the mission, target and value shall be approved and released by the high authority of university, signed by the president with the qualification of a legal person and officially published in the most authoritative media of university, including university statutes, teachers’ manual, students’ handbook, and other related materials. In the process of striving to realize their mission, target and value, all departments of university shall carry out regular assessment, record and file the successful experience and lessons of failure, share the assessment results and make improvements by use of the results. In order to make their mission, target and value recognized by the academic community to the maximum extent, university shall take effective measures and encourage community to participate in the formulation, implementation, assessment, improvement and other activities of their mission, target and value.

Secondly, strengthen specialty construction. The quality of talent training depends on the level of specialty construction. The specialty construction involves many factors such as teachers, curriculum and teaching materials, experiment conditions, teaching methods and teaching management and it plays a leading role in talent training. The construction of curriculum and teaching materials is a key link of talent training quality improvement; classroom teaching and practical teaching are two major channels of talent training quality improvement; the construction of teaching staff is an important guarantee of talent training quality improvement.

Thirdly, carry out teaching research and development. The internal quality assurance of university mainly includes the assurance at school level, at discipline level and at classroom level. The specialty construction is mainly at school level, while the emphasis of teaching research and development is at the discipline level and classroom level. The reason is that university has different disciplines and all disciplines have their own uniqueness, so the quality assurance at discipline and classroom levels is more pertinent, operational and instructive. The curriculum and teaching research and development at discipline level include the quality objective and quality standard of curriculum, the proportion of liberal education and specialty education and of required courses and optional courses, proportion of various courses, objectives of course teaching, performance indicator and measuring tool, learning effect of students and related evidences and other research and development contents.
Main Dimensions

(1) Teacher dimension

Teachers play important role in higher education quality assurance—specialty construction needs the support of courses, teaching materials and experiment conditions, while courses and other material things need to be activated by teachers and teaching administrative staff. Thus, teachers and teaching are the final determinants of talent training quality.\[^{11}\]

In order to give play to the role of teachers in higher education quality assurance, on the one hand, it needs the internal consciousness and self-discipline of teachers. There are many factors affecting the education quality, among which the consciousness of professors is undoubtedly the most critical factor. In order to ensure the quality of education, the emphasis shall be laid on the optimization of universities’ internal environment and it shall be ensured that professors takes academics as their career. Education assessment and other external intervention measures shall ultimately promote the self-discipline of professors; otherwise, the loss will outweigh the gain.\[^{12}\]

On the other hand, it needs external pressures and impetus. That is, it is essential to try every means to arouse the education and teaching enthusiasm of teachers. In the aspect of arousing the enthusiasm of teachers, universities overemphasize external restriction and punishment mechanism design, resulting in the eradication of disorderly behaviors; however, it is hard to find the trace of enthusiasm and creativity which are essential for the assurance of education quality. University administrators shall realize that management is not merely to eradicate disorderly behaviors, and it shall arouse the teaching enthusiasm and creativity of teachers through scientific and reasonable institution design. Firstly, it is essential to seriously study and analyze the institution root of why teachers’ enthusiasm is not high. That is, it is essential to study the institution root of improper incentive, rather than just focusing on the formal requirement of teaching management. Only when those institutions and regulations regarding improper incentive are eliminated can the enhancement of teaching management have the expected effects. According to the actual situation, some teaching management institutions and code requirements fail to arouse the enthusiasm of teachers and students for teaching and learning and they even have negative effects. If there are fewer such teaching management institutions, it may be much more beneficial to the enhancement of teaching quality. Secondly, it is essential to seriously study and analyze the overall institutions for the internal management of universities and their relationship. The design of some institutions which seem to have no direct relevance with teaching may play a negative incentive role in arousing teachers’ teaching enthusiasm. The institution incentive theory tells us that appropriate and effective incentive must meet a basic constraint condition, i.e., participation constraint. The so-called participation constraint of incentive means that it is essential to make the utility obtained by a person through the engagement in some work at least equal the utility which may be obtained by him from other optional solutions. However, in the investigation of the design of universities’ internal institution, it can be found when a teacher can obtain the utility from project application and paper publishing far larger than that he can obtain from teaching work, there are no participation constraint conditions for teaching incentive consequently. Furthermore, in terms of promotion of administrative posts inside universities, what decisive is still the scientific research achievements of teachers, rather than teaching achievements, which also indicates the crux of the problem. The design of such internal institutions of universities has no direct relevance with teaching, but has decisive influences on the behavior choice of university teachers. Then, under such an institution background, what is the point even though the management over teachers’ teaching is strengthened through various punishment mechanisms?\[^{13}\]

(2) Student dimension

The fundamental mission of universities is to train students, so universities shall take the development of students as the core content of internal quality assurance. When building the teaching quality assurance system, universities must attach importance to the design and optimization of talent training programs, as well as the reform of teaching contents and teaching methods. Talent training programs are the specific embodiment of universities’ idea of running
school and the talent training program design and the teaching contents and teaching methods determine the talent training quality to a large extent. In the curriculum system, it is essential to increase the proportion of practical courses, enhance the training of students’ practical ability and increase the proportion of optional courses so as to provide students with more options. Meanwhile, it is essential to help students to build the quality awareness, making them realize the significance of self-quality improvement and forming the idea that everybody is responsible for the quality assurance, fully arouse students’ enthusiasm for participation in quality assurance and make the quality awareness internalized as the guide of schools and promote the students’ all-round development.\[14\] In the process of implementing higher education quality project, we must do a dimension compensation work. That is, we shall stress student-orientated, introduce the students’ perspective and highlight students’ experience and feeling.\[15\] “It is essential to implement three-pronged strategy. That is, besides government accountability and society accountability, it is essential to have student accountability.”\[16\]

In addition, the assessment of students’ learning outcome shall become a core field of higher education quality assurance. In principle, the learning outcome of students shall be proved by evidences. Direct evidences include the result of capstone course, the result of majors and the result of various exams inside and outside schools, as well as other materials reflecting students’ growth and development. Indirect evidences include students’ learning portfolio, in-class and after-class assignments and the self-report of students, alumni and graduates’ employers. Since every school has different targets and positioning, different schools may select different evidences and the curriculum and teaching research and development at discipline level shall enhance the construction\[17\].

(3) Management dimension

The management dimension mainly plays the role of system guarantee and condition guarantee and it is the guarantee of “higher education quality assurance”. Firstly, intensify teaching service and support. With the expansion of higher education scale, teaching has been faced with new challenges. As the total number of students increases, the class size may increase and the time for interaction between teachers and students may decrease. Therefore, besides helping teachers and students to more effectively manage time, university must establish corresponding functional departments to intensify teaching service and support. Through the cooperation with individuals and departments, functional departments supply personalized service and support to gradually turn the traditional teaching management to teaching service and support. The teaching service and support items include the following: supply consulting and guidance for teaching and learning; supply support for improvement of classroom teaching; supply support for teachers’ professional development; supply consulting service for teaching and learning; develop related resources regarding school-based instruction research for teaching staff and students; stimulate interest in teaching; supply guidance to students with learning difficulties.\[18\] Secondly, Build the knowledge management system of quality assurance inside university. In fact, the knowledge management system of quality assurance inside university is a construction project needing long-time accumulation and an overall perspective. In the initial stage, it is essential to have the following construction: firstly, set up an office of institutional research equipped with professional researchers, who are in charge of collecting, processing and sharing the data related to higher education quality assurance; secondly, the office of institutional research is in charge of providing the public platform of the knowledge management system of quality assurance inside university so that people can obtain the data and information related to the quality assurance of the university and peer universities and can generate the knowledge needed by them through the coded data and tools provided by the platform; thirdly, the office of institutional research can provide the knowledge or report needed by customers according to the specific requirements of departments and individuals and provide support for educational decision-making and actions so as to improve information management service and make service, cooperation and sharing become one part of higher education quality assurance culture.\[19\] Thirdly, it is essential to change policy restraint into mechanism restraint and introduce the market competition mechanism in order to guarantee the
higher education quality.\textsuperscript{20} “For the internal of university, competition must affect the vital interests of leaders and teaching and administrative staff and it is essential to deepen personnel and distribution system reform.”\textsuperscript{21} Once the intramural competition mechanism is started, it is inevitable that the leaders in office will actively take all measures for quality improvement (such as emphasizing teaching, scientific research, discipline construction, teaching staff construction and emphasizing the whole process of input-training-output) so as to make an achievement; it is inevitable that the middle-level cadres will do their work with due diligence; it is inevitable that faculty and staff will work hard. Thus, the outcome must be the improvement of education quality and the enhancement of university’ comprehensive strength.\textsuperscript{22}

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