Analysis of the Reasons for the Low Efficiency of Academic Norms Education in Colleges and Universities

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Abstract. The academic anomie is widespread and serious in China. One of the important factors is the long-term serious low efficiency and vicious circle of academic norms education in Colleges and universities. This paper analyzes the main reasons for the low efficiency of academic norms education in colleges and universities: many colleges and universities do not offer subject curriculum and activity curriculum of academic norms education, and there are no corresponding teaching materials of academic norms and specialist lecturers and tutors.

In recent years, the academic anomie of graduate students and undergraduates has been common. Students in some key universities have been exposed to such incidents: In August 2014, Peking University Ph.D. student Yanru Yu plagiarized her paper severely [1]. In January 2017, Fudan University graduate Sijun Qiu was revoked his doctorate for plagiarism of the thesis [2]. It is not difficult to see that the issue of academic anomie has become a realistic problem affecting the quality of talent training in colleges and universities today. Some scholars have put forward beneficial insights into academic norms education. For example, Maowei Qian believes that academic norms have not become operational rules. Naturally, few people consciously abide by academic research norms, and he suggested that the practice of academic norms education should be strengthened [3]. Honglian He and others believe that with the repeated exposure of academic anomie in colleges and universities, the authenticity of academic achievements in colleges and universities has been questioned, and they suggest that a system of academic honesty and credit should be constructed in which “self-discipline” and “heteronomy” interact [4]. We believe that one of the important factors of indeed widespread and serious academic anomie in our country is the long-term serious low efficiency of academic norms education in Colleges and universities, which forms a vicious circle: universities have trained a number of students who have not received strict academic norms education, in turn, some of the students have become teachers and tutors, doctoral supervisors, deans, and principals to train such succeeding students. How could such teachers themselves who have not undergone rigorous academic norms training educate their students and make good effects on their students?

In the following, we will explore the main reasons for the low efficiency of academic norms education in Colleges and universities.

No Specialized Academic Norms Education

Academic norms education has not been included in the formal teaching plan for a long time, therefore, the vast majority of doctoral and postgraduate and undergraduates in the academic field have hardly received rigorous training in academic norms. Academic norms education is in a state of absence, which is often carried out at random. Some teachers can attach importance to academic norms education, but mainly in the teaching of their courses and the guidance of essay writing, and the content of academic norms is often fragmented, scattered and unsystematic, basically based on their own academic experience to teach, so the teaching efficiency is unsatisfactory. Some teachers are highly competent, knowledgeable, accomplished and respected in their speciality. However, there are serious neglects in academic norms teaching, especially in the teaching of academic technical norms.
Not only do they tend to inadvertently cause academic anomie to themselves, but they also have insufficient understanding and guidance on the needs of students in academic norms. Therefore, whether students write a thesis or engage in scientific research, many of them are required by the teachers’ ambiguous requirements or refer to the writings and practices of the previous fellow students, which lead to academic anomie that is almost deep-rooted just like a genetic disease. Because there is no specialized academic norms education, even if students feel the necessity and importance of academic norms from the cases around them, they may unknowingly commit academic misconduct because they cannot find a systematic and comprehensive channel to accept the education on academic norms.

Lack of Specialized Academic Norms Curriculum
For the specific requirements of academic norms, most young students not only lack comprehensive understanding, but also lack courses that can be systematically studied. We understand the curriculum as the planning and design of educational goals, teaching content, teaching methods and educational activities. It is the implementation of the teaching plan. However, academic norms education has never opened the basic curriculum.

Lack of Specialized Subject Curriculum
Subject curriculum is cultural courses and subject courses in the general sense. They advocate that the curriculum should be designed with the subject as the center, and that the curriculum should be set up separately, knowledge should be selected from different subject areas, and thematic curriculum should be compiled according to the needs of teaching, so as to conduct subject-based teaching. However, academic norms are not specialized subject knowledge, and most colleges and universities do not have specialized academic norms in their teaching plans. One of the authors of the paper, as a doctoral supervisor, applied to the graduate schools and graduate teaching leaders of two universities to offer a specialized academic norms course to graduate students. The answer was negative: teaching should be arranged according to the teaching plan, and there is no academic norms curriculum in the teaching plan, so they can not offer academic norms courses for graduate students.

Therefore, we pin our hopes on the revision of the teaching plan, but the question also arises: whether the academic norms curriculum should enter the teaching plan, what should be taught in the academic norms curriculum, whether the academic norms curriculum is an optional or a compulsory course, whether some adjustments in the existing writing or research methods courses can replace the academic norms and whether the teaching plan is revised by the department of the teaching unit or by Academic Affairs Office of the teaching management department. We believe that the teaching plan should be revised by the teaching unit and reviewed by the teaching committee. The academic norms course should be a basic course, which is required by all subjects and majors. It should be added as a compulsory course. A writing course or a research method course can be added to the content of academic norms curriculum, but not a substitute for it.

Lack of Appropriate Activity Curriculum
The activity curriculum, that is, the student-centered curriculum and the experiential curriculum, is opposite to the subject-specific curriculum. It breaks the logical structure of different subjects and the boundaries of knowledge. Students organize learning activities according to their interests, needs and abilities. Activity curriculum is equivalent to a kind of conscious self-study activity.

If the academic norms curriculum is an activity curriculum, then the question is, do the students know what academic norms are? Do the students know the specific contents of academic norms? Can the students consciously learn academic norms? Where can the academic norms textbook be available? Should academic norms courses be included in the teaching plan to record credits? Does the academic norms course have instructors? If so, what is the role of the instructors? Who leads the academic norms course? The reality is that the vast majority of our students do not know what academic norms
are, what the specific contents of academic norms are, and where the learning materials of academic norms come from. A doctoral student with a very good grade in a key university has ever told his classmates before the (thesis) oral defense: My dissertation is absolutely no problem in terms of norms, and I’ve paid considerable attention to the study of academic norms. In fact, although this doctoral student paid great attention to the learning of academic norms, there are still serious problems with academic norms in his dissertation, especially in the form of a lot of low-level errors. His dissertation does not meet the basic requirements of academic norms, nor does it meet the writing requirements of the university itself. His study of academic norms is sporadic, piecemeal, and unsystematic.

Theoretically speaking, there are three forms of academic norms activity curriculum: one is compulsory or optional courses that are included in the teaching plan to record credits, which is different from the subject curriculum: the former is teacher-assisted learning activities, while the latter is teacher-led classroom teaching; Second, extracurricular activities, which are not included in the teaching plan and do not record credits, are organized in the following forms: activities that are led by the teaching department, activities that are led by the publicity department, and activities that are jointly led by the teaching department and the publicity department. The third are laissez-faire self-study activities, but there are differences between colleges: some of them provide, while some colleges do not provide the academic norms of materials and rules and regulations materials. Their common characteristics are lack of organized and sustained activities. In China, the majority of colleges and universities are still in the latter part of the third category when it comes to the curriculum setting of academic norms activities.

We found that many students have positive and self-consciousness in the study of academic norms. However, universities have not carried out the academic norms of activity courses well, which is one of the reasons for the low efficiency of academic norms education in China.

Lack of Specialized Academic Norms Teaching Materials

The teaching material of academic norms is the basis of academic norms education and an important carrier to understand national standards and official documents of academic norms. Without teaching materials of academic norms, how can we talk about academic norms education? On the whole, we lack not only the academic norms teaching materials, but also the academic norms activity course materials.

Lack of Subject Curriculum Teaching Materials

To solve the problem of lack of academic norms teaching material, we must first solve the problem of its legitimacy, that is, academic norms should be a course, on this basis there may be academic norms education teaching materials, which we have discussed before. From the actual situation, most universities have not opened academic norms course, let alone supporting teaching materials.

According to the situation we have mastered, some individual university has opened academic norm courses. For example, the pilot College of Beijing University of Technology has opened an optional course on “Thesis Writing Norms and Skills” at the undergraduate level, with 32 hours and 2 credits. The public optional course, with 60 students per class from 8 majors in grades 2-3, has opened for 4 consecutive years, using self-compiled teaching materials.

The main problems of this textbook are: there is no printed version, and there is no public publication, which is not conducive to students’ preview and review. The content of the teaching material is not systematic, and the teaching is relatively random. The textbook emphasizes academic and technical norms. Although it is taught in combination with students’ thesis writing, students still find it boring. Undergraduates lack perceptual experience of academic norms on the whole, and teachers’ teaching effective is not ideal. Of course, most students report that they are rewarding, especially those who are preparing to study abroad and preparing for postgraduate study are more
motivated to learn. Regrettably, this course was terminated in July 2017 with the withdrawal and merger of the college, and this course was not offered at the graduate level.

Lack of Activity Curriculum Materials

Academic norms activity materials are similar in form to other subjects’ teaching material in form: they are centered on one or a core set of materials, plus other supporting materials or reference materials. They should correspond to the setting form and organization form of the academic norms activity course. Judging from the current situation, most universities have not set up academic norm activity curriculum, and the supporting activity materials for them are naturally out of the question.

According to what we have learned, some individual university, such as Beijing University of Technology, has also offered academic norm activity courses, called the “Scientific Spirit and Academic Norm Education Awareness Month”. It is co-sponsored by the Graduate School of the Party Committee, the Graduate School and the School Discipline Inspection Office of the university. Since March 2012, it has been running for 6 consecutive years, which emphasizes the promotion of integration of scientific spirit and academic ability, the combination of environmental construction and institutional construction, and the combination of instructor training and postgraduate tutoring on the basis of system construction and by means of propaganda and education. The activities of academic norms publicity month include publicity panels, window columns, brochures and expert lectures on academic norms, which create a strong academic norms campus atmosphere, playing an important role in the promotion of scientific spirit, enhances students’ scientific literacy and academic norms moral awareness. However, academic norms, especially academic and technical norms, need to be considered quietly, and can be mastered only by repeated training and practice under the guidance of experts. The academic norms publicity month cannot replace academic norms subject course with credits and credit academic norms activity course education.

Lack of Professional Academic Norms Teachers

Teachers of academic norms education, in our view, can be broadly divided into four categories: full-time or part-time teachers, full-time or part-time tutoring teachers. From the perspective of the teachers’ job position, there must be a job post first, and then there must be professional teachers or the teachers with specialized skills of academic norms who can be hired.

Lack of Job Post

In recent years, many colleges and universities, focusing on the objectives and tasks of personnel system reform, have constantly refined job classification, expanded training, improved assessment and evaluation, and explored mobility incentives, and accumulated some good experience and practices. However, when applied to the job post of university teachers in China, there are no posts for academic norms education, whether for the purpose of setting up posts for the sake of people or for selecting people on the basis of posts. As mentioned earlier, there is no academic norms curriculum, no academic norms teaching material, no formal academic norms education, therefore, there is no post for academic norms education.

Because there is no special job posts, many teachers will feel that the education of academic norms is their additional incidental work, even if the Ministry of Education clearly stated in the “Several Opinions on Strengthening Academic Morality” that “the laws and regulations on academic norms and intellectual property rights and related knowledge should be included in the content of the students’ ideological and moral education, it can be just like a dragonfly skimming the surface of the water. Don’t expect good educational results, for there is little or no content in many schools’ ideological and moral classes. For another example, tutors or instructors mainly focus on the research methods of academic papers and the professional level of the research field when offering the thesis guidance for graduate and undergraduate students, and they pay insufficient attention to the academic
norms education. Some teachers themselves know little about the academic norms, so they cannot do anything even if they are willing to help their students.

**Lack of Professional or Specialized Teachers**

From the perspective of the current professional setting and curriculum setting of colleges and universities in China, we cannot directly find professionals or specialists who have received formal education on academic norms. There are two wrong logics: one is that because we did not have the professional setting and curriculum setting of academic norms education in the past, we do not need to have the professional setting and curriculum setting of academic norms education now and in the future. The other is that since we don’t have a professional or a specialist in formal academic norms education, we are unable to set up majors or curriculum for formal academic norms education.

Academic norms education is by no means a matter of reading one or two documents and listening to one or two lectures. Academic norms include academic ethics and academic technical norms. If there is no professional or specialized teacher or tutor to teach, the academic norms education will be fragmented and hot and cold, and education efficiency will be greatly reduced naturally.

The low efficiency of academic norms education not only affects the growth of students, but also affects the construction of academic style and the healthy development of academic achievements. We objectively analyze the main reasons for the low efficiency of academic norms in colleges and universities, which will help to trigger the education sector and teachers and students of higher education to pay more attention to this, to think more deeply, to take effective measures based on the crux of the problem, enhance the efficiency of academic norms education, and truly implement the fundamental task of “establishing virtue and cultivating people” in higher education, and cultivate more and more excellent talents for social construction.

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