

Practices and Explorations on Talent-training Mode of Self-taught Higher Education Examination

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Abstract

Since the existence of self-taught higher education examination, its fast development has contributed a lot to national higher education reform and economic development. This paper, based on analyzing the talent-training mode of China self-taught higher education, proposes countermeasures and suggestions for problems in the mode at present.

Keywords: Self-taught examination, Training mode

The self-taught higher education examination (Jiagan Dai, the director of the National Educational Examinations Authority), as a great creation of Chinese socialist education system, and the world largest education mode reflecting the life-long education idea and the features of learning society, contributes a lot to the construction of new countryside in China (Office for Guiding National Self-taught Examinations, 2006). In the past 25 years, self-taught examinations have achieved satisfying development in all aspects. At present, more than half of examinees are employees, and more than 60% have three-year academic study or above. It indicates that the traits of continuing education are open, compatible, professional, and diverse (Suping Fan, 2010, p191). This paper takes the talent-training mode of self-taught higher education examination as the objective, hoping to offer references for further development and improvement of self-taught examination.

1. The Present Talent-training Mode of Self-taught Higher Education Examination in China

The self-taught higher education examination combines personal study, social assistance, and national examination together, as an important component of national higher education system in China (Song Lu, 2009, p47-48). In recent years, along with the development of higher education, self-taught examination displays different modes. In detail, there are five typical modes as follows.

1.1 "Certificate and Diploma" Mode

With economic development and social progress as well as the construction of learning society, life-long education, and continuing education system, people's needs for education are beyond getting diploma and focus more on employment, profession, personal interests, and other multiple needs. Therefore, self-taught examination should explore non-diploma and certificate examinations as developing diploma education, following a binding development of diploma and certificate. Plans for self-taught examination majors should consist of certificate curricula and diploma curricula. Students who take examinations for diploma must take examinations for certificate at the same time. In plans of majors, both certificate curricula and diploma curricula are included. Examinations for diploma can be organized like other self-taught majors. Examinations for certificate can be co-organized by provincial examination office and relevant agencies. At present, this mode wins praises in Hefei City, Anhui Province. The improvement of the importance of professional certificate makes this mode more prominent due to its obvious advantages.

1.2 "Curricula Supermarket" Mode

The "curricula supermarket" mode sorts all curricula according to humanities, history, philosophy, science, engineering, and medicine. Each sort includes compulsory curricula and elective curricula, and makes the curricula menu and credits. The curricula of every sort can be "enlarged" continuously, that is, adding new curriculum during certain fixed period. Students can choose curricula from the "curricula shelf" conveniently. Meanwhile, it makes relevant menu for majors. Experts regulate the number of necessary curricula and the requirements for credits for each major, applying the complete credit system. In other words, each major may include more than one set of curricula and each set of curricula includes several sets of modules. Some curricula in each module are selected at random. And the credits must meet the requirement. This curricula-and-credit mode has its advantages: (1) Practical.

Students can select curricula according to their respective needs. (2) Extensive. Lots of curricula are available and the knowledge is extensive. (3) Flexible. It breaks the traditional learning mode and gets rid of time and space limits. Students can get diploma, professional certificate, or one-curriculum certificate based on their own needs.

1.3 "2+3" Teaching Mode

By means of active exploration, Ningbo self-taught examination system tries the "2+3" teaching mode, communicating and connecting technical self-taught examination and junior self-taught examination, starting a special way for self-taught examination. In this mode, the teaching assists time periods including first two years and second three years. Commercial management and financial management are chosen as pilot majors, and Ningbo Business Vocational and Technological School as the assisting unit. Data show that the two majors attract lots of students from rural areas and students who fail the national entrance exams for college. This mode offers an opportunity for middle school graduates in rural areas and also serves as a new thought for the extension of self-taught examination.

1.4 "Internet and Contact-teaching" Mode

Today, it is the man who masters or possesses advanced technologies and methods that takes resources. The self-taught higher education examination can break time and space limit by using information technologies, modern education technologies, and Internet multi-media technologies, enlarging students' vision, offering more learning resources, and stimulating their desire for learning effectively. The "Internet and contact-teaching" mode can effectively solve many problems such as the contradiction between learning and working, the separate location of students, and the resources of teachers, by means of on-line classes. It is a new exploration based on traditional teaching mode. More importantly, it can reduce costs and save money for students.

1.5 "Curricula Process" Learning Mode and "Mutual Credit Acceptance" Mode

The "curricula process" learning mode starts from 2005 in Zhejiang province. As a reform in full-time self-taught examination assisting pilot place, it aims at strengthening the teaching process of self-taught examination and improving the examination-evaluation system. In the traditional mode, if a student has the grade under sixty, he or she fails the exam and must take it again. However, according to the "curricula process" learning mode, daily study is also important. It lays stresses on the learning "process". The grades include two parts, and the proportion of daily grade to final exam is 3:7. This mode changes the former result of "final exam", improves students' enthusiasm for daily study, decreases the pressure from final exam, and significantly increases the ratio of passing exams. "Mutual credit acceptance" is a new mode executed by Zhejiang Education Examinations Authority, which means to make best use of excellent teaching resources. In detail, three courses for three-year institute and two courses for four-year University, and all students take special examinations organized by subjective colleges or universities. In general, the all "mutual credit acceptance" courses are tough ones in specific major, and the pass ratios are usually low.

2. Problems in Talent-training Process of Self-taught Higher Education Examination

The self-taught examination contributes a lot to the development of China higher education. However, due to the enlarging size, problems show up gradually.

2.1 Imbalance of Formal Schooling Education and Non-formal Schooling Education

Since the opening of self-taught higher education examination, the state has defined it as a formal schooling education: "The self-taught higher education examination is a national higher education examination focusing on formal schooling exams." Therefore, all individuals, schools, and even the nation should take the formal schooling education exams as the focus of self-taught examination. The department in charge should design exams based on formal schooling education. Students take self-taught examination to get diploma. Unfortunately, the social and economic development makes more and more industries adopt the employment-passport. Talents with experiences and technologies tend to be the hot. Diplomas are no longer the "qualification certificate" for jobs. A variety of professional certification exams continues to heat up. Then, the limits of self-taught examination become prominent. Compared with formal university education, self-taught examination has no advantage. Therefore, current self-taught examination will be confronted with decreasing students' scales due to its focus on formal schooling education.

2.2 More Stresses on Theoretical Exams and Few on Application Can Not Meet the Social Economic Development

Because of the way of examination being taken into consideration, more courses in the self-taught curricula system are about theories and few practices. It does not get rid of copying the common education mode. As a result, the "examination-oriented education" gains prosperity in field of self-taught examination, which seriously limits the intelligence and the capability of learners (Xinghua Ji, 2003, p110-111). In addition, some courses are very difficult,

which may dampen the enthusiasm of students. Most students complain about tough English and math because they are difficult to pass. Some students still fail the exam after four tries. Indeed, large-scale written exams save time and energy, and can test the level of most students. But the limits are still obvious due to too much emphasis on memory of basic knowledge, which results in “learning the useless, using the unknown” and “developed function of exam, lagged-behind function of education”. The written exam can not deal with the relationship between science and application, between theories and practices. Social development is fast. And the demand for talents is more various, more specific, and more urgent. However, the self-taught examination does not meet the social needs for talents, which causes an imbalance between curricula and social needs. As for the supply and demand of talents, some fields suffer from an oversupply of graduates. Then, some students have to take jobs which are not related to their majors. Therefore, certain majors in self-taught examination must optimize the curricula structure to meet the social needs for talents.

2.3 Focus on Countryside, Insufficient Preparation

The “Report of Self-taught Examinees’ Cluster Traits and Needs” from the Self-taught Examination Direction Office of Ministry of Education shows that 54.3% of examinees are from cities, 18.4% from countryside, and 27.3% from counties (Xinghua Ji, 2003, p110-111). It indicates that countryside is the most potential market for self-taught examination. The progress of new countryside construction will undoubtedly bring about unlimited “commercial opportunity” for self-taught examinees. However, the survey on self-taught examination conditions in countryside in recent years shows that the preparation for self-taught examination in countryside is insufficient. In detail, (1) Copy the mode in cities without any exception. Although the self-taught examination is in practice, its curricula arrangement, contents of courses and examinations are totally based on urban professions, without considering conditions in countryside, emphasizing memorization of knowledge and seldom involving practical knowledge or application of knowledge. Meanwhile, the goal of self-taught examination in countryside is inaccurate due to its poor consciousness of serving rural economic development, and low connection with rural economy in arrangement of majors. The self-taught examination does not focus on rural development. All schools are similar and all students learn the same knowledge. As a result, students can not find a job or start a business. It is no good for the construction of countryside. How to improve farmers’ intelligence and labor techniques, and enhance rural examinees’ ability to change the countryside deserves more attention. (2) Poor publicity. In the survey, the project team finds that farmers know few about self-taught examination, and most farmers do not know it. It is hard to get them or their children to take self-taught examination. Therefore, the expansion of self-taught examination in countryside should be done after the publicity.

2.4 Poor Connection between Self-taught Examination and Vocational Education

By interviewing teachers and students in Ya’an Vocational Middle School, Sichuan Trade School, and other vocational schools, the project team finds they show a great interest in getting a diploma by self-taught examination after they know the characteristics of low tuition, flexible learning, and high recognition of society. The team also knows about their worries, such as the high goal of self-taught examination and low confidence of getting a diploma by self-taught examination because of the poor knowledge base. Therefore, the self-taught examination should cope with the connection with vocational education and make reasonable adjustment based on realities.

3. Countermeasures and Suggestions

3.1 Combine the Formal Schooling Education and Non-formal Schooling Education and “Walk by Two Legs”

Along with the rapid development of social economy, the traditional education mode which lays stresses on formal schooling education over non-formal schooling education can not satisfy the need of social development. China carries out the national professional certificate system in all industries, requiring all employees in relevant fields must possess the qualification certificate. Plenty of employees have already got the certificate, but they must take the relevant authorization of certificate. On the other hand, there is an increasing need for practical and technological talents. In order to adapt to the society and the position, they have to update the knowledge and acquire technique training. It supplies quite a lot of potential students with self-taught higher education examination. Therefore, along with more and more stresses on professional certificate examinations, the self-taught examination should focus on both formal schooling education and non-formal schooling education, on both diplomas and professional certificates, and develop various forms of examinations. Just as what was said by an education pioneer Mr. Yanpei Huang: “Help the lay-off to get jobs, and make employees happy.” The self-taught higher education examination takes employment as the direction, trains special talents with knowledge, culture, and science to meet the needs of society and market, and also develops training programs for practical techniques and professional certificates. It adopts the multiple certificate system, which includes diploma, special certificate, and professional certificate. In the meantime, it widely satisfies the youth’s strong desire for learning and improves people’s scientific

and cultural quality.

3.2 Make Best Use of Self Advantages, and Adjust the Proportion of Theory Courses and Practice Courses, Improve the Ability to Satisfy Social Needs

The ultimate goal of self-taught higher education examination is practice. According to Bloom's *Objectives of Education*, capability = technique or craft + knowledge. From the equation, the acquisition of capability is not only the accumulation of knowledge but also the formation of techniques. It is impossible for educators to instruct or provide students with knowledge to solve future potential problems. However, it is possible for educators to help them change knowledge into ability to adapt to new environment. Therefore, capability and technique are more useful in practice than knowledge. According to the structure of social needs of talents, it is generally fitting for the "Pareto" law in proportion, in a form of "pyramid". The top of pyramid is high-tech talents who focus on researches, academy, and engineering. The proportion is about 15-20%. Other talents account for a percentage of 80-85%. According to the sources of potential students, self-taught vocational students are mainly graduates from vocational schools or employees who take jobs after high school. 95% of self-taught higher education examinees are students or graduates from common vocational schools. Apparently, it does not include talents who focus on researches, academy, and engineering. Therefore, self-taught education should be further improved in the field of vocational technique education.

3.3 Enlarge Self-taught Examination Scope and Extend to Countryside

At present, the self-taught higher education examination has a solid position in cities. But its extension in countryside is unclear. Along with the fast development of rural economy, the proportion of county enterprises and private enterprises in national economy keeps rising. There is an urgent need for high-tech talents and application talents in countryside. Meanwhile, because of the rich material life, farmers are longing to improve their intelligence. The self-taught examination, as a common education mode, has inborn advantages in optimizing the rural talent structure, improving the labor quality, and speeding up the transformation of scientific and technological fruits. Therefore, the self-taught examination must take the responsibility for improving farmers' quality of intelligence, and training application talents for the countryside. The future is bright but the road is tough for enlarging the scope of self-taught examination in countryside. Copying the city mode may not work because of the unique traits of the countryside. Therefore, as we develop the self-taught examination in the countryside, we must take into consideration the imbalance of regional economic development and the diversity of education needs. The provincial self-taught examination office should be empowered with arranging special majors considering the specific conditions of local area.

For all farmers, the eternal theme is to get rid of poverty and become rich. If the self-taught examination can not arrange the curricula properly, straying away from local conditions, it can not supply effective helps for them. And the self-taught examination becomes unattractive. Therefore, the self-taught examination should "think what farmers think, worry what farmers worry, and satisfy what farmers need", making best use of flexible education, offering right courses, and training talents for the countryside.

3.4 Integrate Other Education Resources, and Further Strengthen the Connection with Vocational Schools

The self-taught higher education examination shows its vitality due to its flexibility, openness, low costs, and easy-entrance but hard-graduation. And it wins high social recognition because of the quality and credit. It is an irreplaceable component of national higher education system. Along with rising college enrollment, the foundation of new private colleges, the entrance of foreign universities, and the easiness of adult college entrance examination and distance education, the advantage of self-taught examination, as a compensation diploma education, is declining, and its attractiveness to examinees is lowering (Dongmei Yang, 2009, p10-13). The development of self-taught examination needs sufficient potential students. We must identify all potential students from all industries and branches. We should know that examinees are the God for school-running institutions. Faced with chances and challenges, we should focus more on self characteristics and advantages, integrate all education resources, explore the connection with vocational schools, and achieve a win-win development. Vocational students hope to get a higher diploma and find an ideal job by learning knowledge and techniques. Therefore, the self-taught examination should integrate and use present education resources reasonably and effectively, arranging curricula by fully considering the intelligent base of vocational students, and achieving an appropriate connection with vocational schools. By this way, it can expand the self-taught higher education examination and the channels better.

3.5 Improve the Publicity

The publicity is very important to self-taught examination. It deserves to make people know the advantages of self-taught examination by all means. The great achievements of self-taught examination and the deeds of

self-taught talents should be publicized, and a nice environment for examinees to improve self quality by self-taught examination should also be created. Meanwhile, equipped services should catch up with the development of self-taught examination properly. The possible examples are as follows: setting up assisting stations in counties, offering consultations, helping students to choose a major, completing the registration procedures for examinees based on the market needs, ordering and delivering teaching materials and counseling materials, running the website and relevant journals properly, disclosing information on self-taught examination in time, setting up a hot line for services for the sake of examinees in checking the grades, and helping them solve problems.

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