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Idea construction and countermeasures on reform of credit system in local colleges and universities in China

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of credit system should be suitable for current situations of a college and a province. We should break through the barriers of thoughts, understand credit system rationally, and implement credit system with local characteristics. In addition, we must seek policies from the education authorities and universities to support and protect the implementation of credit system in local colleges and universities, and take holistic measures to establish a sound operational mechanism and a guarantee system for credit system.

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KEYWORDS

Local colleges and universities;
Credit system;
Problem and countermeasures.

INTRODUCTION

In the practice of reform of credit system in colleges and universities in China, the real significance of credit system is far greater than its original intention. It is well known that credit system is a large teaching system^[1], which takes students as the center, the elective system as the basic form, the credit as the management media, and talent training for meeting the diverse needs of the community and a unified development of personalization and socialization as the goal. In the reform of talent training mode, almost all colleges and universities in China are implementing the credit system, involving in higher education, continue education, and vocational education, and credit system appears characteristics of diverse patterns. In 2010, the Outline of Na-

tional Medium- and Long-term Program for Education Reform and Development in China (2010–2020) clearly formulate the development task of higher education to “deepen the teaching reform, promote and improve credit system, implement flexible educational system,.” The outline of the issue gives a new opportunity for the reform in colleges and universities in China, and deepening the reform of credit system has become a historical mission for all colleges and universities in the new period, especially for local colleges and universities. To satisfy the urgent demand of social economic development on diversified and multi-level talents training in colleges and universities in China, further deepening the reform of credit system is still the inevitable choice for the reform of teaching management system in various local colleges and universities.

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STATUS AND PROBLEMS IN THE REFORM OF CREDIT SYSTEM IN LOCAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Phenomenon and essence

Throughout the exploration and practice of credit system in colleges and universities, the elective system, grade point system, restudying system, major-change system, major-minor system, flexible educational system, and tutor system are introduced into the credit system, and good results have been achieved in the reform. However, the effort to promote the implementation of credit system and the depth to implement the credit system are not identical, and an uneven development of credit system appears in different provinces and different universities, especially in local colleges and universities. Due to the differences in local colleges and universities, credit system is promoted effectively in old universities with solid foundation, whereas the operation model of credit system are exploring in most colleges and universities, especially in the new and upgraded colleges and universities. Therefore, the implementation of credit system proceeds slowly in local colleges and universities. In addition, the current credit system in local colleges and universities is still confined to the academic year system, and the selection scope for students to learn is relatively narrow^[1].

Currently, the local colleges and universities focus on the implementation of credit system as a point of the reform of talent training mode. However, because of a superficial understanding of credit system, the connotation of credit system is not discussed in-depth, and the reform of credit system steps into a “misunderstanding”. Therefore, the advantage of credit system is difficult to be fully embodied, and most teachers and students lose their enthusiasm for the implementation of credit system. Regardless of the university’s history and current conditions, some institutions blindly follow ideas of others, identify them, accept them totally, give students more “freedom”, and pursue a so-called “full credit system”. Specifically, it is mistakenly believed that the elimination system and the system of promoting or holding back students can be canceled out by the imple-

mentation of credit system. The guidance and management of student learning process are relaxed, especially for students with academic difficulties. Before graduation, a final make-up opportunity is provided to students who did not pass examinations, and the examinations are relatively easy to pass. This measure reduces the performance criteria for qualified graduates, and results in a decline in the quality of talent cultivation in some extent^[2]. On the other hand, required by the educational reform, credit system is introduced into teaching management in some institutions, but the credit is only set as a management media used in the curriculum management, performance management, and other teaching management processes, and no corresponding management system is developed and designed to match and guarantee the implementation of credit system. But it is thought that credit system has been implemented, which results from the pursuit of a so-called education innovation. A common practice to implement credit system is to open a few elective courses based on the original training plan and designate credits for these courses, and the credit become into a facade and decoration of talent training program. Thus, the implementation of credit system becomes neither fish nor fowl, to a certain extent, the improvement of the teaching management and teaching quality is restricted. Owing to the inertia in education system and education concept, some institutions stick to the old system and the status quo and unwilling to reform, emphasizing the difficulties in objective conditions and teaching facilities and excusing the conditions to implement credit system are not ripe. These institutions can not get rid of the academic year mode, and the “people-oriented and teach students according to their aptitude” philosophy of education merely stays in words.

Difficulties and problems

“Homogenization” phenomenon in training mode in implementation of credit system

The soul of credit system is the personality development. However, for local colleges and universities, the training mode reform and the establishment of the curriculum system lag far behind the requirements of the reform of credit system. The imple-

mentation of credit system is deep-rootly affected by a unified curriculum system, unified teaching requirements, and unified textbooks designed for all students, and the development of students' personality is restricted. Consequently, the demand of the social development on the diversity of talent cannot be satisfied, and the student's vocational adaptability is poor. First, in the training mode reform, the training goal lays more stress on commonness than personality. The training idea pays more attention to instruction than to innovation, and the training plan emphasizes on uniform mode and slights individual differences. Second, the architecture of the curriculum system is more rigid. It is generally thought that the basis of the survival of credit system is based on a lot of elective subjects, high proportion of elective subjects, and wide scope of course selection. Compared to the elective subjects with high proportion offered by American colleges and universities, the number of elective subjects offered by Chinese colleges and universities is small and the proportion of the elective subjects is in a low range of 10%–30%. However, in the small number of elective courses, designated elective courses have a higher proportion, whereas free elective courses are less for students to choose according to their own interests^[3]. Moreover, for elective courses, the requirements are lower on conditions of courses offered, course content, assessment methods, teaching organization and management, which results in the elective courses to be offered arbitrarily, poor continuity, and low quality. Therefore, the elective courses cannot play its due role. In addition, the class hours in teaching programs are excessive, and students cannot spare enough self-learning time.

The implementation of credit system appears high controlled and low flexibility in mechanism of courses selection

The core and key of credit system is whether the length of schooling is flexible. Generally, for old universities with a long history or for new universities, the length of schooling for four-year undergraduate students is set to be in the range from three to six years when the regulations on management of school roll are revised. Though the implementation of flexible length of schooling may be just unfolding, very

few students can graduate early in practice. In a sense, students can only delay graduation and cannot graduate early, and the implementation of flexible length of schooling is nominal^[3]. One reason is high controlled and low flexibility in mechanism of courses selection, and the conditions and environment are not formed for emergence of talents. Specifically, in the implementation of credit system in colleges and universities, the total credits are allocated averagely to each academic year, and the required and elective courses are organized in a basic framework. Fixed courses are offered in each semester, and the teaching process is rigid. Consequently, the teaching organization form is not flexible, and courses cannot be chosen freely, studied in advance, and repeatedly studied for students. Though students are permitted to register an interdisciplinary course, and to make any changes to their course selection by adding a course or dropping a course, it is very difficult to operate in practice. On the other hand, students' major selectivity is poor. Though many universities have tried to adopt measures dealing with major changes and major division to enhance students' major selectivity, only small students are benefit from these policies, due to the limitation of academic standing, low proportion of major change, and the limitation of mutual major change between Arts and Science. Owing to the protection for the development of long-term major and teacher occupation, major division is performed based on students' academic standing. Though students' desire and interest and social demand should be considered in major division, the practical operation cannot avoid employing the stereotype of the college entrance examination enrollment system and the desires of all students cannot be satisfied.

The nominal tutorial system in the implementation of credit system

Local colleges and universities undertake the task of education popularization, and the number of university students has rapidly increased since the increase of enrollment, which results in the uneven quality of students. In addition, owing to the flexibility in selecting courses in credit system, most students entered university in the "examination-ori-

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ented education” mode fall into blind obedience and tend to select easy courses. Therefore, the tutorial system is particularly important for the development of students in local colleges and universities. In practice, the tutorial system is an important part of the reform of credit system, and the implementation results directly affect the effectiveness of credit system. However, the tutorial system is not implemented in most universities in credit system, and the tutorial system does not play a good role in individual colleges and universities in which the tutorial system has been implemented. The increase of enrollments in local colleges and university intensifies the contradiction between the heavy teaching and research work and the shortage of faculties. With the heavy teaching and research, teachers cannot devote enough time and energy into the instruction which does not need substantial responsibility and cannot show the teachers’ performance. On the other hand, though the instruction given by teachers can play a functional role, instructor is not a post to teachers. Thus, in practice, compared to a counselor, a tutor cannot substantially participate in the management of undergraduates and miss the opportunities to guide students to deal properly with the problems in a series of activities.

Tuition fee policy is not conducive to the implementation of credit system

The charge system based on credit system embodies that the idea of modern education is student-centered, respect for individual difference, and focus on personality development. In 2005, approved by the State Council, a document of Colleges and Universities Can Charge Tuition According to Credit Hours of Education without Breakthrough the Tuition Standard issued jointly by the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission, and Ministry of Finance. In 2006, the National Development and Reform Commission again issued a Circular on Further Strengthening the Administration of Higher credit charges. The original intention of the two documents is to stop the arbitrary charges, but colleges and universities are given the basic guarantee of the national policy. Tuition charge according to credit hours of education has

become an inevitable trend in the reform of university system, and a pilot project in a university and a province will be expanded to each college and province across the country. However, most local colleges and universities still charge fees based upon academic year. The government guidance for the management of credit system is not sufficient, and the management fees and price reporting are not standardized and complete. Consequently, policy gaps result in conflicts between the charge system and credit system, and the design on the flexible learning system and the management system is hard to implement in colleges and universities. Confusion and frustration, management difficulties, and a tremendous waste of resources are caused by how to charge fees to students who take shorter or longer than the normal program duration to complete their degree, and those who restudy one or more courses, and those who gain beyond the standard total credits of a program. Therefore, the tuition fee policy plays a decisive role in restricting the implementation of credit system in colleges and universities.

MEASURES AND PATHS FOR THE REFORM OF CREDIT SYSTEM IN LOCAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Idea construction

Local colleges and universities are more shackled with educational philosophy and school conditions, and the implementation of credit system should be more suitable for current situations in a college and a province. It is required that we should break through the barriers of thoughts, understand the credit system rationally, and implement credit system with local characteristics^[4]. First, the teaching reform of credit system should not be examined with mode logic and should be promoted with localization patterns. According to foreign experience, there is no fixed pattern and track in implementation of credit system. Therefore, we should not call credit system with the attributive words of complete or academic year. We should pay attention to cultivate the inner spirit of credit system, and should not be overly concerned with the external performance of the teaching management behavior of credit system^[5]. Sec-

ond, the main field of implementation of credit system is located in colleges and universities, and the ultimate effectiveness of credit system is depended on the determination and support from colleges and universities. The implementation and improvement of credit system need to form an optimization mechanism of cooperative education by departments of teaching, personnel, finance, management, and logistics in an integration framework of recruitment, training, and employment via the overall measures of school top design under the guidance of the great teaching idea.

Practical policies

Expand the way of versatile personalized talent training

Rationality and scientificity of talent training model and curriculum system are the most important factors affecting the implementation of credit system. Local colleges and universities should implement undergraduate education accommodation mode oriented to the employment needs of students in the light of school's conditions. First, an environment for cultivating inter-disciplinary talents should be created, and the talents cultivation mode should be reformed in an opened comprehensive disciplines environment. The education should adopt a wide scope professional education mode based on general education. In this education mode, the enrollment and training are carried out according to the discipline category, and a flexible curriculum system framework is built to meet the needs of versatile personalized talent training based on a construction of many types of course groups, a design of multi-standard training program, and a variety of development paths for careers and further studies. In the background of the national deepening the comprehensive reform in the field of education, some majors and classes are set up based on the integration of high-quality resources, the implementation of integrated construction, such as inter-disciplinary major, major/minor inter-disciplinary experimental class, scientific research institution and college joint-training experimental class, enterprise and college joint-training experimental class, and joint-training international class. Second, free-learning environ-

ment is created, and the amount of structure learning is reduced. Students are given more learning space and freedom by the semester system reform, reducing the minimum graduation credit requirements, shortening the theory class, increasing the proportion and the number of optional courses^[6].

Construction of student-oriented elective mechanism

Students are the beneficiaries in credit system reform. The purpose of implementation of credit system in colleges and universities is to make all students with different abilities and different development aspirations to find a suitable environment for the development by creating an environment for student's personality training. In local colleges and universities, the difficulty in credit system reform lies in the curriculum quality and the number of elective courses. However, offering more elective courses is not the only way to enlarge students' choice range. Therefore, colleges and universities continuously strengthen the course construction and improve the utilization of existing resources. At the same time, guaranteeing by institutional innovation, a flexible selective mechanism is built through institutional innovation to meet the student maximum selectivity in curriculum and major. First, we should build mutual help alliances of colleges and universities and implement a credit mutual recognition system^[7]. Second, we should change the traditional teaching methods, offer online network courses, and implement grade (classification) teaching. Third, students are not required to declare a major during their first two years, and they must declare a major by the end of their fourth semester of enrollment. Fourth, if a student participates in some scientific and technological programs and gets excellent results, he will receive some credits, which can be transferred credits for some general education courses.

Improve the operating mode of tutorial system

Owing to the increase of enrollments of colleges and universities, the shortage of teachers in colleges and universities has become an indisputable fact. Teachers are the main bearers of credit system reform, and how to build an effective operating mechanism of tutorial system with limited teacher resources

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becomes a serious problem. First, according to the ability of the students and situations of teachers, different operating modes of tutorial system can be explored, such as full program tutorial system, grade tutorial system, excellent student tutorial system. Second, tutors should establish a sense of personalized talent training. Tutor-student communication can be taken at autonomous time or at regular time, and students can be offered individual or group tutoring according to the students' needs and the tutoring contents. In addition, tutors can form groups, and tutoring can be provided by individuals or by team tutors. Third, a comprehensive evaluation mechanism should be established. The work performance of teachers and the learning outcomes of students can be quantified by flexible assessment methods, respectively, which can provide the basis for workload, incentive, and recognition^[8].

Reform of the charge system of credit system

In the practice of credit system reform, education policies become various thresholds that local colleges and universities are unable to cross. Because the charge system lags behind the demand on credit system reform, the administrative intervention of government departments should be decreased, and the reform of the charge system should be expanded. In the principle of classified guidance and government-oriented, the related reforms on the charge system and the credit system are carried out. With the continuous advance of the reform of credit system in local colleges and universities, some relevant policies should be introduced timely to guarantee the reform.

CONCLUSION

With credit system as an entry point for the reform of colleges and universities, credit system must be improved. The reform of credit system in local colleges and universities is not only the needs of the reform of talent training mode and course system, but also is an inevitable choice to promote the development of higher education healthy and orderly. To fully implement credit system, we must seek policies from the education authorities and universities to support and protect the implementation of credit system in local colleges and universities, and take holistic measures to establish a sound operational mechanism and a guarantee system for credit system.

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