

A Comparative Analysis of China's Student Evaluation in the New Era

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Abstract: Student evaluation, which involves assessing students using specific standards, techniques, and methods, encompasses self-evaluation by students, evaluation by educators, and so on. It has long been a focal point and challenge in China's educational system reform. This paper aims to broaden the approach to developing and reforming student evaluation within the context of China's new era by summarizing its evolving characteristics, analyzing its pain points, and comparing the concepts and standards of student evaluation in developed countries with those in China.

Keywords: Student evaluation; Comprehensive quality; Comparison

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1. History of student evaluation and analysis

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, student evaluation has changed greatly in our country. Against the background of a comprehensive study of the Soviet Union, the educational field completely negated the previously accumulated experience in educational evaluation, and adopted the "Soviet-style evaluation system" called the five-level scoring system^[1]. In the early 1960s, following the breakdown of Sino-Soviet relations, China began to criticize the Soviet educational model comprehensively, and the student evaluation gradually returned from the five-level scoring system to the 100-point system. Therefore, the educational system at that time was dominated by political education, and the student evaluation mainly focused on political performance.

Since the reform and opening up, great changes have taken place in our country's education, and student evaluation has also undergone corresponding adjustments. In May 1985, the Decision on the Reform of the Education System issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China decided to fundamentally change this situation, requiring a comprehensive reform of the education system. In February 1993, the CPC Central Committee and The State Council promulgated the Outline of China's Educational Reform and Development, and in December 1998, the Ministry of Education promulgated the Action Plan to Revitalize Education for the 21st Century, which put more emphasis on all-round development and quality education. An evaluation system with comprehensive quality evaluation as its core has been gradually established.

In recent years, with the deepening of educational reform, student evaluation is facing new challenges and

changes. In October 2020, The State Council issued the Overall Plan for the Reform of Educational Evaluation in the New Era, and the Ministry of Education put forward the direction of education reform of “taking moral education as the core and comprehensively cultivating talents” [2].

1.1. Changes in student evaluation

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, based on the changing policies of student evaluation, the main changes can be summarized as follows:

- (1) From political dominance to comprehensive development: In the early years of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, student evaluation mainly focused on political performance, emphasizing political thought and consciousness [3]. With the changes of the times, student evaluation gradually changed to focus on students’ all-round development and quality education, and the scope of evaluation expanded to behavioral morality, aesthetic literacy, personality development, social practice, innovation ability, and other aspects.
- (2) From a single index to a diversified index system: In the past, student evaluation mainly relied on an independent index such as political thought. In recent years, China’s education reform has put forward the policy of “taking moral education as the core and comprehensively cultivating talents,” and student evaluation focuses on cultivating students’ ideological and moral quality and comprehensive ability. The evaluation index system is more diversified, and the evaluation criteria focus more on the development of students’ moral quality, innovation ability, teamwork, practical skills, etc.
- (3) From single standard to comprehensive cultivation of talents: In recent years, China’s education reform has introduced the policy of “taking moral education as the core and comprehensively cultivating talents.” As a result, student evaluation now emphasizes the development of students’ ideological and moral qualities, as well as their comprehensive abilities. The evaluation standards place greater emphasis on fostering students’ moral character, innovation, teamwork, practical skills, and other key areas.

1.2. Pain points of student evaluation

According to the author’s experience and investigation, the pain points of student evaluation against the background of China’s new era are summarized as follows:

- (1) Stereotyped, procedural, and quantitative evaluation: Student evaluation is often based on fixed standards and indicators, focusing on results and rankings. Even some public welfare activities are ranked, and the evaluation takes no account of the involvement process. Such evaluation methods may cause excessive competition among students who only pursue a high ranking and ignore the core of the activity. The evaluation method, which leads to the utilitarian pursuit of titles and honors, fails to fully consider students’ individual differences, interest cultivation as well as potential exploration. This one-size-fits-all evaluation method cannot truly and effectively assess students’ interests, nor can it stimulate students’ motivation and creativity.
- (2) Influenced by traditional values: Students attach more importance to standardized tests in the evaluation, such as the college entrance examination, which emphasizes students’ knowledge mastery and test-taking ability, and ignores the cultivation of comprehensive quality and innovative ability. Similarly, due to the nature of standardized tests, student evaluations often emphasize rote memorization, operating on the belief that the more one memorizes, the higher one’s scores will be. This approach tends to overlook the importance of in-depth understanding and the application of knowledge. In the process of self-evaluation, students often focus on proving themselves through traditional scores rather than highlighting their

personal strengths in areas such as moral character, intellect, physical condition, and mental well-being. Similarly, when comparing themselves to others, they may feel embarrassed about emphasizing virtues, intelligence, physical health, mental state, and community service. They tend to believe that academic scores, seen as a symbol of “personal identity,” should be the primary measure of success.

- (3) Emphasizing the final exam as the determining factor: In the stage of compulsory education in high schools, higher vocational colleges, and universities, the performance evaluation of Chinese students is still based on the score of the final exam. Therefore, for most students and colleges, the student evaluation makes no difference to the results of students’ performance and the following admission, which is a kind of formal evaluation to meet the regulations.

2. Comparative analysis of student evaluation methods with those in developed countries

Although there is no explicit wording like “comprehensive quality evaluation” in foreign countries, many developed countries have established academic examination and quality monitoring systems as well as relatively mature college enrollment systems. This system can be regarded as “comprehensive quality evaluation” or “student evaluation” in the context of international education. Developed countries have accumulated rich experience in both theoretical research and practical practices, which is worth learning from. Combined with the above contents, the author draws the following advantages for reference and makes a comparative analysis of student evaluation methods with those in developed countries.

2.1. Personalized and flexible course selection system

In developed countries, a flexible course selection system is commonly practiced in middle school. Most students can make their own choices in many courses based on their personal interests and needs, which can effectively stimulate their potential. The author experienced the college entrance examination reform in Guangdong Province in 2021, which adopted the “3+1+2” method for college entrance examination. In this method, Chinese, Mathematics, and English are the 3 compulsory courses; either history or physics can be selected as the “1” course. The remaining 2 subjects are chosen from Politics, Geography, Biology, and Chemistry. Due to the different combinations, there are indeed more choices than before, but the actual course framework, type, content, and assessment methods have not changed. As one of the two courses must be selected from physics and history, it is generally believed that the “3+1+2” method makes no significant difference compared with the previous division of Arts and Sciences.

2.2. Emphasis on interdisciplinary training

In recent years, the middle school curriculum in many developed countries has begun to pay attention to the cultivation of students’ interdisciplinary abilities. For example, the STEM curriculum in the United States, and the IB International Baccalaureate Program and the A-Level in Singapore have all set up comprehensive courses and encourage students to take cross-discipline courses in order to cultivate multi-dimensional comprehensive and innovative thinking. Compared with the courses offered by most developed countries, such as writing and speech, American history, English grammar, literature, basic mathematics, science, sociology, leadership, geography, economics, as well as art, history, music, publishing and yearbook, and drama, which are some of the elective subjects offered for students, China does not provide enough courses for students to evaluate.

2.3. Retaking the test to obtain the highest score

GCSE and A-Level exams in the United Kingdom and SAT exams in the United States are mostly staged multiple

exams. Students can retake the exam to obtain the highest score. Japan has also made it clear that the goal of university entrance exam reform is to make examination opportunities more varied and build a system that enables students to retake the exam. Multiple examinations effectively avoid the influence of accidental factors on scores, reduce exam pressure, and weaken the requirements of exam-oriented examinations on students, so that students have more opportunities to develop their personal qualities in an all-round way. At present, the English college entrance examination in Zhejiang Province follows this approach. However, multiple examinations are not widely promoted in other provinces as the education reform is rigorous and progressing slowly.

3. Inspiration from the comparative analysis of the American student evaluation model

As the forerunner and leader of higher education in the world, the educational concept and mode in the United States are exemplary, and they have mature development concepts, forms, technology, and management of student evaluation. The author concludes the following worth-learning content from a comparison and analysis of student evaluation in American colleges and universities.

3.1. Improving the college student evaluation system

The United States also has entrance exams like China's college entrance examination, called SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) and ACT (American College Testing), differing in content. The Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcome (AHELO), which measures both general skills (critical thinking, analytical thinking, problem-solving, and writing) and specialized skills (limited to economics and engineering), aims to test the required skills of students upon graduation. MLS (Multifactor Leadership Scale), which seeks to understand the role of higher education in shaping socially responsible leadership and understanding leadership development among college students, tests student admission characteristics and captures a variety of experiences during college, focusing on experiences outside the classroom, such as mentorship from employers^[3]. The diversified outcome survey and evaluation system also includes NILOA (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment) and GPI (Global Perspective Inventory).

In addition, there are also more flexible and free process surveys. For example, College Student Experiences Questionnaire, National Survey of Student Engagement, and Collegiate Learning Assessment.

3.2. Adding momentum to student evaluation in practice

The diversity of student evaluation participants in American colleges and universities has added a steady stream of momentum to student evaluation. The participants of student evaluation in the United States include the federal government, state government, and third-party institutions, such as the American Association of State College and University, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, the private sector, and public universities in practice^[4].

In addition, alumni, parents, and students are increasingly involved in student evaluation and gradually realize that they are stakeholders and have the right to participate in student evaluation with the infiltration of political democratization into the educational field and the development of the concept of educational empowerment. Under the impact of the marketization of higher education, consumers are aware of the right to demand that institutions improve the quality of education.

4. Conclusion

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China has carried out a series of reforms in the content and methods of student evaluation, which has improved students' quality and ability in many aspects, such as virtue,

intelligence, physical conditions, mental state, and community service. However, due to the unchanged status quo of China's primary stage of socialism, most of the student evaluation methods in China are rigid and single, lacking depth, systematicity, and standardization. Thus, it is necessary to keep on learning from the developed countries to innovate and explore scientific student evaluation methods suitable for China. For example, to take student evaluation as an important reference for enrollment, we should vigorously develop comprehensive quality education, flexibly change education methods, improve the college student evaluation system, add momentum to student evaluation with multiple participants in practice, and create a cultural atmosphere for student evaluation.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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