

Research Review on the Improvement of Scholarships Evaluation in Chinese Colleges

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Abstract: Scholarships have been playing an important role in higher education because of its positive incentives. As the essential element of scholarships, scholarships evaluation has a direct influence on the effect of scholarships. Educational workers have worked on improving scholarships evaluation for function maximization, and they have gained theoretical and practical achievements. Built on related studies, the paper is to briefly introduce the current situation of scholarships in Chinese colleges from three aspects: purpose, program and process, to describe three obvious difficulties scholarships evaluation having faced: Matthew effect caused by changeless criteria, unfairness in reviewing non-academic criteria, and the dominance of summative assessment, and to relate three corresponding strategies educational workers have put forward: making Catfish effect by establishing dynamic evaluation system, increasing fairness by quantitating non-academic criteria, and weakening the dominance of summative assessment by introducing foreign educational assessment theories. It is worth to further explore how to gain better balance between achieve effectiveness and demonstrate practicality.

Keywords: scholarships, evaluation, criteria

1. Introduction

Scholarships have been playing an important role in higher education because of its core function: to give positive incentives. Studies evidenced that scholarship is an important way to create healthy competition and reinforce motivation to study, and it has a lasting and positive impact on students' academic performance significantly [1]. As the core of scholarships, scholarships evaluation is defined to a series of steps in a broad sense, including designing, informing, applying, reviewing and awarding [2]. However, some researchers have been showing concerns towards scholarships evaluation, such as prevalent Mathew effect among students, unfairness perceived in reviewing non-academic criteria, and negative influence caused by dominant summative assessment. For maximizing the effect of scholarships, educational workers have been improving scholarships evaluation, and they have put forward many significant strategies, such as designing differential evaluation criteria, establishing dynamic evaluation system, quantitating non-academic criteria, and introducing foreign educational assessment theories. The purpose of the paper is to explore strategies for dealing with difficulties which scholarships evaluation have faced. The significance of the paper is to reintegrate researchers' views and results for further improving scholarships evaluation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Current Situation of Scholarships in Chinese Colleges

The Chinese government had provided free tuition and additional financial aid with college students in financial difficulties from 1952 to 1982. The concept of “scholarships” was first officially proposed in 1983 [3]. In the late twentieth century, a comprehensive financial-aid system was basically formed, including scholarships, grants, loans, work-study programs and tuition and fees reduction [4].

2.1.1. Purpose

The basis of scholarships had fluctuated between need and merit over time. With the development of comprehensive financial-aid system, scholarships, grants, loans, work-study programs and tuition and fees reduction performs function independently. Scholarships are awarded based on merit, such as standardized test scores, academic performance, creativity skills, collaboration skills, and social responsibility. The purpose of scholarships has become more and more clear, which is to motivate students and award excellence [5].

2.1.2. Program

Compared with a variety of financial sources in Western higher education, such as clubs, charities, foundations, organizations, companies, colleges, governments, and individuals, Chinese scholarships usually come from three types of financial sources: financial allocation, colleges revenue, and social donation [5]. Statistical data evidenced that the government investing in financial-aid system still has dominant situation around 50% [4]. Correspondingly, there are many scholarships programs in Chinese colleges, national scholarship, the first/second/third prize scholarship, merit student, excellent cadre, outstanding graduate and so on [6].

2.1.3. Process

Educational workers ensure a relatively fair competition environment through process standardization. Taking the whole scholarship process from a famous Chinese college as an example, students take self-assessment whether meet all requirements at first, and then qualified students submit application online before deadline. Secondly, each department makes preliminary recommendation, and then these recommendations are open to public scrutiny for several days. Thirdly, student affairs office makes review, and then these candidates are open to public scrutiny for several days. Fourthly, college committees give approval for the candidates without controversy. Finally, these scholarship receivers are awarded prizes and honors, and they are often made role model [7].

2.2. Difficulties with Scholarships Evaluation

Standardized scholarships evaluation can maximize the positive incentive effect of scholarships [2]. As the most important ingredient of scholarships, educational workers make effort to ensure its fairness, openness and transparency; however, there have been some difficulties about scholarships evaluation in Chinese colleges.

2.2.1. Matthew Effect Caused by Changeless Criteria

The Matthew effect refers to “the rich get richer while the poor get poorer”, widening a gap between few and many students [8]. Although some colleges limit the number of scholarships program that a student can apply for, a small amount of students win scholarships still. Educational workers noticed

that there are prevalent Matthew effect among students, and the cause for the phenomenon is more likely to generally constant and keeping fixed scholarships criteria [6]. The majority of students regard scholarships as the race for excellence, and determine to quit quietly. It not only dilutes the positive incentive effect of scholarships, but makes a negative impact on motivation, positivity, all-around development, and even educational equity [8].

2.2.2. Unfairness in Reviewing Non-academic Criteria

The majority of Chinese colleges use a comprehensive scholarships evaluation system, in which there are two parts: academic criteria (scores, GPA, etc.) and non-academic criteria (values, traits, creativity, collaboration, social responsibility, etc.). A study demonstrated that 58.6% students felt unfair about scholarships evaluation by analyzing questionnaires results from 200 randomly selected students enrolled in a college. Specifically, 33.7% students reckoned that a few teachers and student cadre show subjective bias or favor during reviewing non-academic criteria [9]. Compared with academic criteria like GPA, non-academic criteria like abstract values and character traits are difficult to be measured accurately [10]. Inadequate handling is more likely to undermine students' values of fairness [9].

2.2.3. The Dominance of Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is used to reveal whether or not learners have arrived at the end of a academic term or year, for instance, standardized test is a typical form of summative assessment [11]. In 2000, Zuo pointed that scholarships evaluation overemphasized outcomes but neglected process. Scholarships evaluation rubrics consist of at least moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic, in which the intellectual part almost equal to scores accounts for 60%-65% [12]. Although scholarships evaluation rubrics have become more and more comprehensive, a few teachers and students supposed that scholarships evaluation still emphasizes on scores in practice [9]. The dominance of summative assessment in scholarships evaluation puts students in the same position without considering individual differences, diversity, and improvement.

2.3. Strategies with Scholarships Evaluation

Researchers absorbed applied management theories, cognitive psychological knowledge, foreign educational assessment theories and models. On this basis, educational workers have put forward a series of strategies to solve the above difficulties.

2.3.1. Making Catfish Effect by Establishing Dynamic Evaluation System

Sun came up with a idea that introducing psychological knowledge of Catfish effect to weaken Matthew effect. The Catfish effect refers to the presence of a strong competitor can motivate the other to perform better, which is widely used in human resource management. In the filed of higher education, it means to break old balance and create new balance [13]. Educational workers suggested that colleges should sort existing scholarship programs for avoiding the same students to be awarded repeatedly and create different kinds of scholarship programs for providing more students with growth opportunities [14]. Researchers proposed that according to Vroom's theory of expectancy and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, educational workers should design more individual, pluralistic, and diversified evaluation criteria for prompting students development [15]. It is more important to establish a dynamic evaluation system with reasonable evaluation measures which can keep abreast of the times [6].

2.3.2. Increasing Fairness by Quantitating Non-academic Criteria

With regard to those controversial non-academic criteria, researchers proposed to quantitate it or decrease its share by adopting mathematical model method as soon as possible. For example, academic performance can be measured by the number of papers or patents students having published, activity participation can be measured by the number of activities students taking part in, collaboration skills can be measured by the average score from applicators' classmates, teachers and administrators, and society responsibility can be measured by students' volunteer time identified by communities [2]. Through three-year experience, some educational workers supported that quantitation is a useful way to minimize subjectivity, increase practicality, and improve transparency [16]. Practice showed that it is crucial to design a set of detailed evaluation criteria in advance and to collect students' certification materials periodically throughout the whole academic term or year [17].

2.3.3. Introducing Foreign Education Assessment Theories

Eisner believed that "the major resources of the schools should be devoted to increasing the effectiveness of individuals rather than predicting and selecting talent" [11]. Formative assessment refers to in-process evaluation, and its fact is improvement [18]. William stated that "the crucial feature of formative evaluations, for both Scriven and Bloom, is that the information is used in some way to make changes" and "used to make adjustments to better meet those learning needs" [19]. Many colleges have already set up scholarship programs for progress or minorities specially [12]. Considering formative assessment and summative assessment are not necessarily exclusive of each other, educational workers have contributed to combining formative assessment with summative assessment in scholarships evaluation. Not only concrete outcomes are measured, but also abstract attitudes, values, and potentials showing in process are assessed seriously [10]. With the development of the forth generation evaluation, its essence is to co-construct evaluation consensus. Some colleges have taken measures to empower stakeholders, for example, having valued students' feedback on scholarships evaluation and having involved students themselves and related people into scholarships criteria makers and reviewers [20].

3. Conclusion

Based on these strategies taken by educational scholars, the underlying of college scholarships evaluation has been transforming from distribution fairness to relation justice with respecting the free development of individuals [21]. However, it has been a difficulty that how to achieve educational goals and demonstrate enormous practicality both. For example, enriching the types of scholarship programs can break barriers, enlarge coverage, and promote diversity, but it is a remaining puzzle whether the positive incentive effect of scholarships could be weaken because resource is limited. When the fruit is scarcest, its taste is sweetest. The more scholarships receivers are, the less scholarships incentives are [2]. Quantitating or decreasing non-academic criteria can reduce disputes in some extent and create a higher-fairness, but it is worthy to note that full quantiation in scholarship evaluation might have negative impact, such as character traits being underestimated and utilitarian thought and act being stimulated [12]. Involving students themselves and other related people into scholarships makers or reviewers can be beneficial to identify gap and close gap between teachers and students, but it needs to be considered the differences between Chinese colleges and Western colleges, such as the number of students and students' cultural background. In reality, the measure is likely to lose its original intent and become pro forma eventually. Moreover, following complex calculation and process could impose heavy burden on not only workers but participants, so each measure before implementation merits careful consideration and repeated deduction. In the end, the

paper is limited by the author's bias, experience, and targeted reading, so it will be more evident and persuasive to conduct a meta-analysis or an empirical research on this topic in the future.

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