

Comparing the Quality Assurance System of Postgraduate Education in China and the United Kingdom

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Abstract. Postgraduate education in China has been developed for more than 70 years since 1949. With these years' development, the number of postgraduates overhead many developing countries. Especially during these three years, many Chinese universities expand the volume of postgraduate. After that, the problems for postgraduate education increase. China's government and related higher education institutes are struggling to improve the postgraduate education system. The system of many developing countries' postgraduate education is relatively more thorough and systematic than China's, especially the postgraduate education in the U.K. Therefore, by comparing the postgraduate education between China and the UK about the internal and external content of the system, it is beneficial for China to find the more current problem and helps it improve. This paper reviews some former literature that studies the difference between China and the UK related to the system of quality assurance in postgraduate education. It compares the difference between internal and external quality assurance in China and UK. Therefore, it will fill in the research gaps of the scant quality assurance system of Chinese postgraduate education in these studies.

Keywords: Postgraduate education; the quality assurance system; China, UK.

1. Introduction

Even though postgraduate education in China has developed for many years and has a relatively quality assurance system, Covid-19, appears which poses an influence on the development of postgraduate education. As covid-19 hinder economic development, job marketing requirements for undergraduates reduced than before, and some companies had to lay off employees to alleviate their financial stress [1]. As a result, many undergraduates and jobless individuals choose to pursue a higher degree in order to increase their competitiveness in the labour market. Universities in China also increase their enrollment quotas in an effort to lessen the problem. Consequently, Master's study has gained popularity in China. It is crucial to examine other nations' quality assurance systems in order to determine the benefits of implementing them in China in order to ensure the quality of postgraduate education. [1] suggest that European countries have formed a relatively perfect guaranteed system and supervision mechanism for the quality assurance of postgraduate education, represented by U.K., U.K. Postgraduate education quality assurance system's mode is mainly coordinated by government-social and university. But the development of postgraduate education in China is late, drawing on the educational quality assurance patterns of developed countries is beneficial to the development and enhancement of the educational quality assurance work in our country [2].

This paper will compare the quality assurance system of postgraduate education between China and the UK through two aspects. The first aspect is the internal quality assurance, such as the quality of enrollment (the enrollment of postgraduates), the process of cultivation (the studying duration and cultivating aims, the course design), and the output of quality assurance. The external quality assurance aims to compare the different support for China and UK's postgraduate education.

2. Internal Factors

2.1 Program Duration and Training Objective

In China, there are two modes for a master's degree. The training objective of Chinese master's degree students is comprehensive moral, intellectual and physical development, proficiency in a foreign language, solid basic theory and specialized knowledge of the subject, and the ability to engage in teaching, scientific research or independently undertake specialized technical. [3] The first mode is called academic master, in which students should have three years of learning. This training mode aims to cultivate students who want to receive Ph.D. degrees in the future and pay more attention on researching. With the development of master's degrees in China, another mode named the professional master is set up, in which students should have two years of learning. The aim of this mode is to cultivate students' application.

The degree structure of British postgraduate education includes Master's by Coursework and a Master's by Research. The first mode is called master's coursework and the time of this mode is one year. Course-based master's education focuses on cultivating students' basic professional qualities, especially their majors' professional practice ability, focusing on serving students' future careers and employment services [3]. The other model is Master by Research, which is two years. It aims to cultivate high-level application-oriented talents who can serve economic development and meet the needs of specific industrial sectors [4].

2.2 Input Quality Assurance

In China, postgraduate students are recruited based on the complementary approach of excellent applications from both inside and outside the university. [3] Argue that it has a national postgraduate entrance examination for enrollment postgraduates. This examination usually examines students' English, policies, math, and specialized courses, which depend on the chosen universities and majors. There will be an interview when this test is passed. The kids will thereafter be enrolled. Students who desire to meet the requirements for exemption need not take this test; instead, they should get a recommended exemption from their undergraduate institutions. However, top colleges only admit standout graduates from prestigious institutions.

In British, there is no postgraduate entrance examination like in China, but there is an application system instead. People can apply for admission if they have the appropriate degree or bachelor's degree. The different colleges have their own standards when they decide on the enrollment of postgraduates. They will have the corresponding different requirements based on the various majors or backgrounds [3]. Most colleges ask students to prepare school reports about their undergraduates' courses, personal statements, curriculum vitae, and recommendation letters. Based on these materials, they will screen the students who meet their requirements and give their offers.

2.3 The Course Design

In China, the courses are divided into three components, including the first public compulsory course, the second public compulsory, basic theory, and specialized courses. The first compulsory course studies Marxist theory for students to master basic political theory. The second component asks students to learn a foreign language. In most cases, it is English that aims to help students expertly read foreign language information. The last components of the course are the basic thorny and specialized courses. These courses focus on teaching students to learn knowledge related to their majors.

In the UK, there are also some parts of courses about postgraduate education. The first part is the basic courses based on 2-3 compulsory courses, involving the field of research and research methods of the subject [5]. These courses aim to understand the important research fields of the major and solidify a foundation for scientific research in the future. The second component is professional advanced courses so that postgraduates can have specialized knowledge in their study area. In order

to strengthen the training of scientific research thinking, the last course system set up seminars to promote postgraduates to take part in discussions.

2.4 The Output Quality Assurance

In the UK, Master's by coursework is assessed by completing the required credits and submitting a qualified dissertation. For the master by research, the dissertation is the main content of the examination. The Ph.D. study usually takes 3 to 8 years to complete the corresponding research projects during the studying period; and in the last year, they need to complete the thesis related to their study field.

In China, different universities regulate their graduating standard for postgraduates [6]. But, overall, they take part in two aspects. The first requirement is that the postgraduate should pass their compulsory courses and specialized courses. Another requirement is that they must publish a certain number and quality papers according to their universities' standards.

3. External Factors

The British higher education system is constantly changing with social development. In the past few decades, the central and local, government and the intermediary gradually formed the model of "pluralism and co-governance" enabling all stakeholders to balance each other in power distribution and operation [6]. There are two main principal components that commonly guarantee the quality of postgraduate education in the U.K.—intermediary organizations and the government [7]. For the intermediary organizations, Higher Education Funding Council for England is responsible for giving financial support and financial regulation, which is the based development of higher education. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education designed the unified quality standards and framework, which ensures the coordinated development of universities in the U.K. [8]. The main mask of the Research Assessment Exercise is to evaluate and rank the quality of higher education in the U.K. The United Council for Graduate Education designs the related regulations and policies to ensure the effectiveness of management and leaders of Higher education. The council for National Academic Awards is the agency that is responsible for awarding and granting the qualification of higher education diplomas in the U.K. The other main principal component is government, which gives policy support to quality assurance in the UK. It does not play a direct role in the quality assurance of postgraduate education in the U.K., and it relies on intermediary agencies. The governments play a macro-supervision role and grasp the overall situation [9].

The government in China plays the main role of external quality assurance of postgraduate education [10]. The government mainly responds for guidance, evaluation, and supervision and then the policies of postgraduate education will be implemented by the Ministry of education, PRC under the State Council [11]. The social intermediary organizations also evaluate and rank universities in China, but their influence is lower than the government in terms of science and recognition [12].

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the comparison of the quality assurance system of postgraduate students in the United Kingdom and China is divided into two parts, the internal and the external. The internal quality assurance system mainly concentrates on enrollment quality, the factors during training link and the output quality. In conclusion, some literature, on enrollment, founds that these two countries are totally different. The U.K. only enrolls postgraduates through applying, whereas China enrolls students by examination and selects excellent students as undergraduates. For the training objective, in general, China mainly aims to cultivate academic talents, especially for the Master's degree, there is less consideration of the different characteristics between the academic master and professional master. However, the organization of training objectives in postgraduate education in the UK is more varied. The training objectives for academic and professional masters are explicitly distinguished, and the

training objectives for professionals are tightly linked to the social economy and the student's intended future career sectors. The U.K. postgraduate education's various training years are consistent with its diversified training goals [9]. The varied training years may accommodate various students' demands, allowing them to pursue various graduate degrees in accordance with their requirements and their own time, expertise, and financial resources.

Although, in China, it also set up different learning years for various requirements for students. The quality of postgraduates for 2 years is lower because of lacking knowledge and capability. These pupils are not recognized by the job market. Because various postgraduate students focus on different elements of their study subject, the course design in the U.K. is more adaptable than in China. Additionally, postgraduate students in the U.K. have access to interdisciplinary coursework and recently developed disciplines. In China, the infusion approach of teaching still predominates, which restricts pupils' capacity for creativity, problem-solving, and discovery. On the contrary, postgraduates are better at learning independently, innovating independently, and communicating and cooperating with their peers, due to the abundant teaching methods. In China, when postgraduates graduate, they should publish the required number of essays according to different universities' requirements. However, in the UK, the requirement is more related to their majors, and the style of cultivation.

For the external quality assurance factors, the government in China plays the main role to guarantee and guiding the quality of postgraduation education. In the UK, the intermediary organizations and governments mutually guarantee the quality system of postgraduation education.

Through generalizing the former literature, there are some research gaps that should be researched in the future. Firstly, a few kinds of literature focus on economic factors. Different economic environments will bring challenges or changes to the system of quality assurance. For instance, China and UK face the Covid-19 which brings a challenge to the economy. Under this circumstance, whether the postgraduates' enrollment will be influenced, such as the resisting numbers, the methods of selecting or exam action is worth to researching. Secondly, the number of qualitative research is few. Most of the research focuses on the former literature or current policies to compare the difference between the UK and China. But it is short of convincing data to prove researchers' findings. It is difficult to argue that postgraduate education in the U.K. is superior to that in China. Therefore, further study may be done in the future to compare the postgraduate education systems in the U.K. and China while also focusing on other elements like the economy and doing quantitative research. For this paper, maybe there are some factors that influence the system of postgraduate assurance, but it does not conclusion.

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