Analysis of the Policymaking Process of Undergraduate Tutorial System in China from the Perspective of Multiple Streams Theory

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Abstract. The formulation process of China's undergraduate tutor system involves many factors. Based on the perspective of multiple streams theory, this paper analyzes and discusses the driving factors for the establishment of China's undergraduate tutorial system policy agenda. Policy makers form the problem stream through surveys of students and teachers; the government and colleges, as policy entrepreneurs, shape the policy stream; under the China's unique conditions, the educational philosophy of the Communist Party of China and the popularization of higher education develops into the politics stream. At a critical point, the three streams are coupled and the policy window opens, which eventually leads to the introduction of the undergraduate tutorial system. Additionally, this paper also analyzes the defects of the multiple stream's theory, and puts forward suggestions for the revision of the theoretical model.

Keywords: Undergraduate tutorial system, Policy agenda, Multiple streams theory, Policy window.

1. Introduction

The tutorial system is an educational system, which has a long history. As early as the 14th century, Oxford University implemented the tutorial system, which is characterized by the close relationship between teachers and students. Mentors should guide them not only in their studies, but also in their lives. The tutorial system is the foundation of the undergraduate education of Oxford University, and it is the key to the quality of education (University of Oxford, 2022).

Undergraduate tutors mainly give the students guidance advice and suggestions on the basis of planning, career planning and life planning, and promotes the improvement of comprehensive quality of students, helping them become all-round people. Actually, the undergraduate tutorial system also has a long history in colleges and universities in mainland China. When Peking University and Zhejiang University as policy entrepreneurs took the lead in fully implementing the undergraduate tutorial system in 2002, this "imported product" has begun to integrate into local universities and become popular in various schools (Baidu, 2021).

Meanwhile, China's Ministry of Education has been pushing for the implementation of the system. Whether in response to the call of the country, or based on their own development needs, over the years, more and more universities have joined the sequence of setting up undergraduate tutorial system.

2. Theory

According to John Kingdon, he inherited the essence of the garbage can model mixing different things together. Due to the bounded rationality, it is difficult to predict when policy will change (Greer, 2015). He then realizes that an item is put on the agenda because of a confluence of factors at a given moment, rather than one or the other of them acting alone. This joint action is also the connection and intersection of Problem Stream, Policy Stream and Politics Stream in the theory of multiple streams analysis (MSA). Problem stream includes all kinds of problems to be solved by the government; Policy stream include a variety of policy proposals, policy propositions and policy programs; Politics stream include factors such as national sentiment, public opinion, distribution pattern of power, and strength contrast of interest groups, etc. These factors reflect the political situation and political background. Therefore, the occasional convergence of the three streams signifies the organic combination of specific issues, policy schemes and political situations. And this organic combination
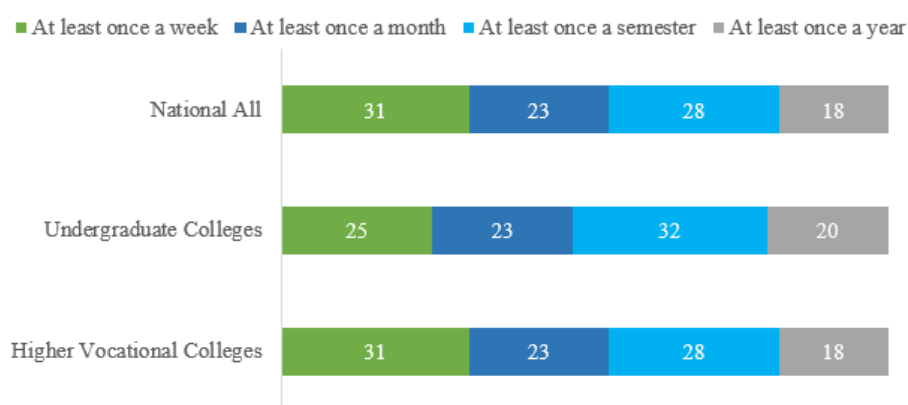
means that problems, policy programs and political situation are compatible instead of mutually exclusive.

These three streams are mainly independent of each other, and each develops in line with its own dynamic characteristics and rules. However, at a critical point in time, when these three streams come together, the problem will be put on the agenda. The biggest policy changes come from a combination of issues, policy advice and politics (Perry & Kingdon, 1985). Such timing is known as policy windows, which is an opportunity for proponents to promote their solutions or draw attention to their particular problems. Hence, the policy window is also called the window of opportunity. The combination of all three makes it much more likely that an issue will command the highest attention of policymakers. Policy windows can be opened by pressing issues, such as COVID-19 pandemic and 911 event, or by political events, such as Nixon's visit to China and Trump's win of election. The reason why issues are identified issues is changed framing, focusing events, indicators, policy evaluation and policy feedback (Perry & Kingdon, 1985). Policy agendas are established in problem or politics streams, and alternatives are generated in policy streams.

The occasional convergence of the three streams also needs the vigorous promotion of policy entrepreneurs, involving individuals, groupings or corporate actors. They play an important role in providing policy advice by reason that they are policy advocates who have an important influence on how policy issues move onto the agenda. They are willing to use their time, energy, fame, and money to raise policy issues and their solutions. They are responsible for bringing the issue to the attention of important people and for bringing together public issues and their solutions. For example, Tencent utilized its advanced technology and high reputation to offer citizens electronic social security cards in pilot city, Shenzhen. Meanwhile, as a policy entrepreneur, Tencent has given government policy suggestions on issues such as government standard setting, information security and trust in private enterprises. By this token, policy entrepreneurs have a pivotal position in policy changing.

3. Analysis

3.1 Problem stream

Source: MyCos Research.

Figure 1. The degree of after-class communication between college graduates and teachers in 2018 (%)

Problems in the problem stream can be sudden or long-term. To ensure the quality of undergraduate training, communication between teachers and students is a key. In recent years, data released by MyCOS shows that 54% of 2018 college graduates communicate with their teachers at least once a week or at least once a month after class. Among them, 25% of undergraduate graduates communicate with their teachers at least once a week after class, lower than that of higher vocational college graduates (37%) (Wang, 2021). The communication frequency between teachers and students is still not high. Additionally, in this system the university generally has the problem of high pupil-

teacher ratio the and the shortage of advisor resources. A teacher needs to instruct 20-30 students. What is more, most mentors have to do their own hard teaching and scientific research, so under such great pressure caused by the ratio, they have no time and energy to tutor students. After all, the majority of supervisors believe that the evaluation of professional titles linked to scientific research results is more important. Obviously, if there is no institutional guarantee, the motivation of mentors themselves will be likely to be compromised, and the quality of students developed by undergraduate tutors become extremely challenging.

3.2 Policy stream

The Ministry of Education of China has issued several relevant documents and formal institutions aimed at establishing and improving the academic tutor system for undergraduates, arranging qualified teachers to guide students in learning, and formulating personalized training programs and academic career plans. As we can see in the case two, schools have already actively responded to and introduced this system with their own inner policy. Furthermore, provincial governments also attach great importance to the implementation of undergraduate tutorial system. For instance, In November 2021, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education issued an action plan to promote this system, making it clear that Beijing would support undergraduates with certain foundation and potential to enter projects and laboratories, and promote the integrated development of science and education (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2021). By this token, forming a policy community, regardless of the central, the local government and universities resort to policy tools to impact on policy making or changing.

3.3 Politics stream

As is known to all, China is a socialist country guided by Marxism. In the practice of Chinese quality-oriented education, we have a new understanding of Marx's theory on the all-round development of human beings, especially the explicit proposal of people-oriented thought (Ding, 2009). Instead of concentrating on contributing to the social development partially, promoting individual development as the inherent value of higher education is a vivid expression of the

"people-oriented thought". Due to the fact that students' needs have both similarities and differences, this political thought proposed by CPC is of particular importance in the policymaking. Especially in the context of higher education popularization, the structure of students, including age characteristics, family environment, social experience, pursuit of interest and career ideals, presents a multi-layered and complex trend. Nonetheless, the current teaching activities based on grading and classification cannot meet the needs of different students. Hence, the party and government instill this political thought into the policymaking of the undergraduate tutorial system embodying unique nature in the instruction content.

4. Discussion

The great contrast between the background of MSA and China's realistic political participation mechanism lays the basic premise for our optimization and supplement of this theory. The MSA method draws on the research results of garbage can model, puts forward a theoretical framework at the system level, and takes the whole system and independent decision making as the analysis unit. From this perspective, the influence of the system of government is evident in the process during which policies are put on the agenda. In the decentralized American politics, it is meaningful to analyze interest groups and government changes separately. In many other countries, however, political phenomena are constrained by more centralized conditions, and political parties play a relatively large role in limiting policy choices. The core of Chinese politics is to lead the government with the Party (CPC). Although the officials insist that serving the people heart and soul is our purpose of the CPC, policy issues are not mainly from citizens' policy demands but from the observation and recognition of officials at all levels of governments and parties. For instance, the emotion of

undergraduates for lack of tutoring from teachers does not cause the problem stream, if authorities are indifferent to it. In general, political parties tend to dominate political flows and exercise tight control over policy choices. The ideology of the

ruling party limits the types of problems that can be put on the agenda to open the policy window, and defines the types of solutions that can be accepted.

Additionally, in the traditional MSA theory, the three policy streams are independent of each other, and each is subject to different forces, considerations and styles. However, in the Chinese context, the independence of the three streams is greatly weakened, and there is an obvious trend of interaction and integration among the three streams. As we mentioned before, the development of the undergraduate tutorial system is started by some elite universities, which use their strong influence to exert impact on decision-making level, the CPC and Ministry of Education. This means that the politics stream is attributed to the production of the policy stream. Thus, any change in one of stream will result in a chain reaction of other policy streams.

In balance, in order to make MSA better fit in China studies, we make the following modification.

First of all, the ideology of the ruling party can be added into the theory, due to the fact that the ruling party plays an indispensable role in policy making of a great number of countries. Such changes do not weaken the analytical power of the theory, but such integration makes sense in countries with relatively centralized political systems and powerful political parties. Moreover, we advise that three streams can be integrated under specific context. Although the boundary among the three streams has been blurred and the window of policy has not been identified when opening, this modification is meaningful to providing more contexts that MSA can apply to.

Undoubtedly, whether a modified model is scientific depends on the long-term test of practice, and how to realize decision optimization within the framework of the existing decision model remains to be further discussed by scholars.

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