

## Study on the Problems of Specialty Adjustment in Local Universities Under China's New Normal

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Supported by 2015 Education Sciences "Twelfth Five" Program in Jilin Province "Researches on the Problems and Countermeasures of the Undergraduate Specialty Adjustment in Local Universities" (ZD15029).

Received 7 September 2015; accepted 2 November 2015

Published online 26 January 2016

### Abstract

In China, the specialty adjustment of the local universities is short of dynamic mechanism and scientificity, which, at present, is one of the most ubiquitous problems among the universities. Particularly, as China's economy enters into the new normal, what Chinese universities shall jointly deal with at the moment is how to adjust specialty scientifically and effectively according to the current economic changes and exposed problems. Against the background of China's new normal, combined with the present economic situations and market demands, the local universities shall start from their own problems and find out ways of adjusting specialties scientifically and then put forward some countermeasures and suggestions to promote a higher and more sustainable development.

**Key words:** Chinese universities; Specialty adjustment; Problems; Countermeasures.

Zhuang, L. N., Zhou, D. C., Li, J., Zou, X. H., & Xing, X. Y. (2016). Study on the Problems of Specialty Adjustment in Local Universities Under China's New Normal. *Canadian Social Science*, 12(1), 11-17. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/8034> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/8034>

### INTRODUCTION

At the end of 1994, the Central Economic Working Conference has systematically illustrated the new normal of economic development, that is, China's economy has been presenting new traits: The Rate of growth transfers to a mid-high speed from a high growth speed; the way of development transfers to intensive from extensive; the economic structure transfers to inventory adjustment as well as optimal increment simultaneously from incremental capacity; the economy is increasingly driven by innovation instead of input and investment. Briefly, it's featuring the characteristics of speed change, structure optimization and driving force transferring. Liu Yandong, vice-premier of the State Council of China, clearly proposed that to know about the new normal, to adapt to the new normal and to lead the new normal is the theme of the economic development at present and in the future, as well as the logic of educational work.

As China's economy has entered into the new normal, Chinese universities have also exposed some new problems in the changeable market economy. The most salient problem is that the specialty adjustment of the local universities lacks dynamic mechanism and scientificity. What the local universities need to do is how to adjust the structure of specialty scientifically and effectively based on the demands of markets and education. Hence, at the moment, the local universities shall be quick to transform their ideas strategically and globally in order to adapt to the new demands of economic and social development,

so that they can establish a new developmental mode and path for the specialty adjustment and reconstruction under the economic new normal.

## **1. PROBLEMS OF SPECIALTY SETTING IN LOCAL UNIVERSITIES UNDER CHINA'S NEW NORMAL**

### **1.1 Abundant and Comprehensive Disciplines With Increasing of Specialty**

With the policy of expanding enrollment in 1999, Chinese universities adjusted the structure of specialty on a large scale and the local universities were active to increase the categories of disciplines. However, it's noteworthy that the disciplines are abundant and comprehensive, which doesn't mean they are classical and outstanding, because the unreasonable disciplinary structure has brought more and more serious problems to the local universities. In a deep sense, all those problems originated from the immature developmental concepts, the unimproved developmental mechanism as well as the unscientific developmental mode.

### **1.2 Disciplinary Specialty Resetting Featured With Homogenization**

Driven by the short-term economic interests and owing to a lack of prospective analysis on the future developmental trend of the social employment structure and blindly pursuing the current market hotspots, the local universities just increase their specialties without decreasing those unnecessary ones, compete to add such specialties with little investment and quick results as Law, Computer, English, Art design, Electronic information, Public affairs administration, Business administration and International economics and trade and so on and the resetting ratio takes up over 90%, which result in the popular specialties redundant and in a low-level construction development. However, some rush specialties in our country or some areas are rather few, like the laborious industries with bad working conditions. Besides, the same specialties in different universities are extremely similar on the objectives of talents training, course settings, teaching contents and skills, lacking individuality and characteristics. The high ratio of specialty resetting causes the education resources gathering in the limited areas, which go against the optimal allocation of resources. Some specialties shall be cancelled or compressed whereas they still remain established. Actually, they occupy lots of resources, such as the source of students, teachers and other public facilities. By contrast, some emerging specialties are of underdevelopment owing to a lack of core disciplinary support and shortage of education resources.

### **1.3 Structure of Disciplinary Specialty Disjointing With Industries, Discordant With Regional Economic Development**

The adjustment of the social economic structure necessarily requires the universities to make some adjustments in the structure of their disciplinary specialties. However, in most local universities, the structure of their specialties discords with the local economic development and the quality of talents training doesn't satisfy the social demand. On one hand, the overall strength of the local universities is weak because of the comparably short history itself and suffering funds shortage. Although there are great market demands in such industries as the local pillar industries, leading industries and some basic laborious industries in society, the local universities are in a stalemate owing to lack of the necessary school-running foundation and conditions as well as the funds (Zeng, 2015). On the other hand, the local universities ignore the connotative construction and the improvement of the quality of the disciplinary specialties so that they can't meet the demand of the industrial restructuring. Besides, the local universities usually pay much attention to the new specialty application yet ignore their construction. Influenced by the inertia of school-running development and the traditional thinking mode of running schools, those universities can't thoroughly remolded the old specialties that aren't adapted to the new requirements of social development. However, some new specialties are not developed so well and the discipline construction lags behind, hence the shell phenomenon arises, which causes the disciplinary specialty and the quality of talents training uncoordinated with the regional social development.

### **1.4 Characteristic Specialties Setting Focusing on Quantity Instead of Quality**

Nowadays, the overall development becomes the trend in the social development. Hence, the goal of the local universities is to become a comprehensive university. In order to expand their influence and popularity, those universities blindly add some characteristic specialties to attract people's attention, while they actually have no such advantageous disciplines at all. Finally, those new specialties become weak links in the process of teaching. Obviously, although they have the attitude that "when others have none, we have one", yet they fail to achieve the effect that "when others have the rest, we have the best". For example, some normal universities and medical universities pursue the popular specialties and take the first chance in the enrollment regardless of the shortage of their own education resources. They compete to set up management science and economics and the like, unilaterally pursuing the broad coverage of disciplinary specialty and losing their original schooling characteristics as well as advantages.

### **1.5 Discipline Constructions Unbalanced With the Scientific Researches**

In our country, since the scale of higher education kept expanding, the higher education has developed rapidly and a large number of excellent scientific researches have been achieved. As the independent innovation ability of the universities has been improved significantly, it also boosts lots of high-level technology-innovative talents. Besides, our country has also issued many related policies and put great emphasis on the importance of science, technology, talents as well as education. However, it's a pity that there appears the mind of quick success and blundering academic inclination in the academic field. Consequently, it seems that the universities do not pay much attention to the teaching of undergraduates. As is shown in the survey, at present, the provincial key universities have achieved great scientific researches whereas they've devoted less attention and investment to their specialty setting. According to China's statistics of comparing those "red, yellow and green card" specialties in the universities, most local universities still suffer from the unbalanced distribution and a lack of promising specialties. Huang Gaoling, member of China Democratic League and professor of Ji Mei University, points out that the universities shall lay an emphasis on the undergraduate education, and the teachers shall devote a large amount of time to curriculum design and course teaching. The universities can't just highlight the papers, projects and scientific research funds. Only a few professors merely underline their scientific researches and negatively affect their teaching. Some college teachers are engaged in their scientific or academic researches and busily attend various seminars as well as academic lectures, finally they cannot guarantee their teaching hours, so that they have to often cancel their courses with no good reasons. What's worse, the class hours in one term fail to be achieved punctually, which causes the decrease of the quality of education.

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## **2. SUGGESTIONS FOR SPECIALTY ADJUSTMENT OF LOCAL UNIVERSITIES UNDER NEW NORMAL**

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The specialty adjustment of Chinese universities always lags behind the industrial adjustment. There are mainly two reasons. On one hand, there is a complicated evolving process for the establishment of the college disciplinary specialty since the industrial restructuring. On the other hand, as the social economic development law is not completely consistent with the college development law, the universities need a long period to cultivate talents and the specialties must keep stable. Hence, the disciplinary specialty adjustment must have a scientific attitude and long-term vision. Moreover, it also needs

the government's macro-control, the leading role of the universities and the wide participation of the society.

### **2.1 To Strengthen the Government's Macro-Control and Give Full Play to Policy Guidance**

The government shall strengthen the macro planning and management and lead the universities to develop rationally, mismatch competition and avoid the low-level duplication, striking to achieve the optimal allocation of the social education resources in the whole society. Firstly, the government should formulate a reasonable macro-planning of the structure of the provincial higher education and avoid overlapping investment and convergent competition. It should also indicate the preferential developing fields and directions of the disciplinary specialties and greatly support those disciplinary specialty application and construction which conform to the national industrial policies and the regional economic development. Secondly, it's necessary to transform the government functions and further expand the autonomy of running schools in the universities, fully motivating their activeness and initiative. Thirdly, it's necessary to strengthen the talent demand forecasting and improve the market information mechanism. By mastering the market demand, employment demand and technological development demand, the government can enhance the statistical analysis and forecasting of the regional human resources and provide a convincing report of the education market and demand acting as active policy guidance. Fourthly, to establish and perfect the functions, like assessment mechanism; to guide the universities to punctually adjust the disciplines and specialties based on the social economic development and talents demand.

### **2.2 Specialty Overall Distribution Agreeing With the Needs of Regional Economic Development**

Disciplinary specialty restructuring shall not only accord with the social demand, but also conform to the need of universities' development, embodying the best school-running benefits. To establish a good system making the structure of disciplinary specialty featured the characteristic of self-adjustment, is the key point to resolve the problem that the structure of the disciplinary specialties isn't adapted to the employment structure. Hence, the universities must give full play to the independent regulation, actively integrate into the construction of regional economy and set up the specialties according to the social needs.

On one hand, the universities shall clearly define their school-running orientation and integrate into the regional social economic construction. In the new situation, the local universities must clearly persist in the applied school-running orientation, speed up the pace of disciplinary specialty restructuring and establish the sound operation mechanism that the disciplinary specialty setting can automatically adapt to the social

economic development and the market needs. Moreover, the specialty distribution actively docks the high-tech industries and strategical emerging industries highly supported by the local government. To set up specialties needs to conform to the vocational market demands. According to the industrial demands, it's necessary for the universities to form a professional cluster to promote the integration between the production and teaching and the cooperation between the enterprises and the universities so as to enhance the social adaptiveness of talents training and to improve the universities' schooling-running strength in the process of serving the regional economic social development.

On the other hand, to scientifically formulate the disciplinary specialty adjustment and development planning shall insist on the road of characteristic development. First of all, it's necessary to change the way of disciplinary specialty adjustment, which transforms to ex ante prediction from the post-event adjustment. Secondly, based on the fact that the disciplinary development achievements can help cultivate talents, to focus on the construction of the targeted disciplinary specialties and to timely put the scientific researches into practice as so to help resolve the local social economic problems (Du, 2014). Thirdly, to insist on the road of characteristic development, gathering the advantageous resources, creating college's outstanding specialty brand and shinning points and winning social reputation. Last but not the least, to establish and improve the intramural independent selection mechanism of specialty in the universities so as to respect and satisfy the need of the students' personality development. If so, the students can give full play to their independent selection rights and switch their majors freely after enrollment.

### **2.3 To Construct an Open Mechanism of Specialty Adjustment With Broad Participation of the Society**

As they cultivate talents for the social employing units, it's necessary for the universities to know more about the development frontier and the industrial needs and widely collect and follow the social employers' opinions, finally building an open regulation mechanism among the industries, the enterprises and the markets. First of all, to set up a professional construction and coordination organization composed of the government, the universities and representatives from all walks of life. Those outstanding participants can indirectly adjust and control the disciplinary specialties by means of participation in decision-making of the specialty construction of the universities and the quality assessment of the specialties etc. Secondly, to enhance the cooperation of production, studies and researches. The universities and the enterprises can draw on each other's strengths to achieve common development. They can take advantage of various means including holding science and technology expositions

and the scientific researches exhibitions and the like to strengthen their communication and connection, hence, promoting the innovation and coordination between them and achieving win-win outcomes. Thirdly, to actively guide the social intermediary institutions to take part in the disciplinary specialty assessment, achieving the mechanism of efficiently separating their respective function of management, organization and assessment, in order to promote the efficiency of running schools and to avoid the structural imbalance between the talents training and market demands.

### **2.4 To Construct and Perfect the Undergraduate Specialty Catalogue to Adapt to China's New Normal**

At present, as the catalogue and the structure of the specialty setting are not so sound in Chinese universities, a large amount of great experience and achievements must be learned from those world-class universities to perfect our specialty catalogue.

American universities have considerable autonomy in specialty setting, which is not constrained to the specialty catalogue edited by the government. Therefore, their specialties are various. As one way of providing specialty information for the universities and compiled by the Federal Ministry of Education, the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP)—American guiding curriculum classification standard, includes the specialties already established in American universities based on a certain taxonomy, which is a kind of reflection to the present specialty situation instead of a conventional guidance document. Thanks to its high degree of autonomy, American higher education features the characteristics of distinct levels and diverse and it puts great emphasis on the curriculum in specialty setting, which helps make the specialty, the curriculum and practice integrate perfectly (Tang, 2010).

British universities also have great autonomy in specialty setting. They are extremely open and diversified in specialty setting. It takes a long period for the university to set up a new specialty. Firstly, the related department has to fully prepare the materials. After they are discussed and researched by the school academic committee, those materials can be reported to the university and then they also need to be examined and discussed by the experts from other universities. This process usually takes several months or even a whole year. As the application procedure is rather strict, it can guarantee the quality of the new setting specialty.

German higher education belongs to the federal system and also has great autonomy in the specialty setting. German university specialties have no unified catalogue. According to *The Higher Education Statistics* and based on the specialties that every university has already established, they will change a little year after year. German universities, particularly those traditional ones,

nearly cover all the disciplines. And as for the specialty setting, they have better followed the scientificity of the disciplinary development and cultivate the academic professionals. Moreover, German universities put more emphasis on the integration of the disciplines. Hence, they have more characteristics and applicability in establishing new specialties.

In the process of the specialty catalogue setting, Chinese universities shall not only consider the social economic development, but also focus more attention on the individual development of every student on such aspects as students' personality, thoughts shaping as well as to what extent the students have freedom to choose their specialties. Therefore, Chinese government shall transform to macro-control from concretely setting up specialty catalogue and change their top-down directive management mode. Meanwhile, it shall transfer more rights of setting up specialties to the universities, which can help the universities consciously conform to the requirements of the national development in specialty setting.

### 3. MEASURES OF SPECIALTY ADJUSTMENT OF LOCAL UNIVERSITIES UNDER NEW NORMAL

In July 2010, China issued *the Guidelines of the National Program for Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development (from 2010 to 2020)*. The document has pointed out that "it's necessary to adapt to the requirements of the national and regional economic and social development, to build up a dynamic adjustment mechanism and to continue optimizing the structure of higher education. By perfecting the disciplinary specialties, types and hierarchical structure, it can help promote the interdisciplinary integration."

When establishing the structure of their own specialties, Chinese universities, based on the policies of the Ministry of Education and the local education authorities, must actively explore the dynamic mechanism for adjusting the structure of the specialties that is suitable to their own development and carry out the mechanism strictly from the perspectives of the professional assess system, the enhancement of specialty evaluation and specialty accreditation and the implementation of specialty pre-warning and specialty withdrawal and so on. Only in this way, the universities can fundamentally guarantee that their future disciplinary specialties could have a healthy development.

#### 3.1 To Strictly Carry Out Professional Assess System, Especially for Those New Specialties

As for those universities, the newly-established specialties, to a large extent, decide the distribution and flow directions of the limited education resources in

the future. Meanwhile, they decide the tendency and direction of the related disciplinary development in the future. Therefore, when establishing a new specialty, the universities must strictly carry out the professional assess system and prudently apply for the new specialty.

To set up a new specialty, it must conform to the college's school-running orientation and developmental planning. It needs the support of the related disciplines and specialties as well as a stable social market demand, and can satisfy the needs of optimizing the structure and the layout of the specialties. Under the equal conditions, it gives priority to developing the specialties related to the hi-tech and strategic emerging industries. To set up a new specialty also needs a scientific demonstration and has a deep investigation and overall analysis on the social talents demands. It also should make clear the objectives of cultivating talents, the scientific program of specialty construction as well as the program of talents training. Besides, to establish a new specialty, it must possess such necessary basic conditions as a certain number of full-time teachers, education-related persons, self-contained teaching buildings, books and materials, instrument equipment and practice base and so on. Before setting up a new specialty, it should set out working on exploring the way of cultivating talents in a form of professional direction in advance and at least has one year of graduates. As the secondary units have the limited schooling-running resources, in order to guarantee the quality of the new-setting specialty, it's requested that the units that are constructing the new specialties within three years shouldn't apply for establishing new specialties again. To set up a new specialty, they must strictly follow the procedure of examination and approval. Consequently, the new specialty to be set up can be reported to the related superior department only after the jointly audit of schooling teaching committee, educational administrative department, human resources department and assets management department, as well as admission and employment departments and finally getting the principal's office's approval through discussion.

#### 3.2 To Enhance Specialty Assessment and Specialty Accreditation

To organize the specialty assessment and actively participate in the specialty accreditation is a fundamental but significant way to promote the school's specialty construction to develop in a connotative way. By means of assessment, it can help the specialties to conform to the educational law, to make clear their school-running ideas, to strengthen the basic construction of teaching, to enhance teaching administration, to deepen the educational reform and comprehensively improve the specialty teaching quality. By means of accreditation, it can not only confirm that the quality and overall development of the school's professional education have reached a certain standard, but also help the school

earn the public's trust as well as the corresponding qualification of school-running.

Firstly, it's necessary to formulate the index system of specialty assessment. Based on the quality standard of specialty construction formulated by our country and combined with their school-running orientation, training objectives and service, the universities should work out their own index system for specialty assessment. Moreover, according to the index system, they can enhance the specialty construction and improve its quality to promote the specialty construction to develop in a connotative way.

Secondly, it's necessary to build a specialty construction norm database. In a certain range, it shall publish the annual data about the specialty construction, which at least includes the number of the students from all the specialties, the full-time teachers, the teachers with senior professional titles, the new enrollments in one year, the register rate for examination of first choice and the initial employment rate for graduates. And the data issued can provide some objective references for specialty assessment. Besides, the specialty construction shall consciously accept public supervision in an all-round way in an open transparent environment.

Thirdly, it's necessary to implement the intramural specialty assessment. The universities themselves shall build an assessment system of specialty and regularly implement the assessment for all the specialties inside the universities. It's noteworthy that the universities shall pay attention to different specialties in different levels. Especially for those newly-established or pre-warning specialties as well as those specialties at the lowest locations in the annual database, the universities shall significantly give more examination and re-evaluation.

Fourthly, it's necessary to actively promote the specialty accreditation. According to Yang and Chen (2012), since 2006, the Ministry of Education has started the specialty accreditation for engineering education. By 2013, after joining "Washington Agreement", China has developed and improved various specialty accreditations, which are represented by the specialty accreditation for engineering education. Against that background, combined with the current situations, Chinese universities should actively promote the specialty accreditation in a way of "batch cultivation, pushing them one by one". Moreover, the universities should enhance the construction of quality guarantee system and deepen the educational reform to improve the quality of talent training and the construction of specialty as well as the professional competitiveness.

### **3.3 To Perfect Intramural Mechanism of Specialty Pre-Warning and Withdrawal**

Firstly, it's necessary to clearly define the conditions of pre-warning, stopping enrollment and revoking specialties.

The so-called pre-warning means giving a warning ahead of time. The corresponding conditions shall be formulated according to the measures that have been taken in the process of the specialty pre-warning, the decrease enrollment, and the stop of enrollment as well as the revocation of specialty.

If one of those situations listed below happened in the universities, it's suggested that the universities should implement the intramural specialty pre-warning so as to attract more attention and alert to the related specialties in advance. The register rate for examination of first choice is less than 20% last year or even for three consecutive years (except those fundamental disciplinary specialties); the initial employment rate for graduates is less than 70% last year or the initial employment rate ranks at the lowest locations of the universities for even three consecutive years; the specialties marked red and yellow card have a very low employment rate which is issued by the Ministry of Education or the educational departments.

If one of those following situations happened in the universities, it's suggested that the enrollment should be ceased. The register rate for examination of first choice is less than 15% for two consecutive years. The initial employment rate of graduates is less than 50% last year or the initial employment rate ranks at the lowest locations of the universities for even three consecutive years. The results of the intramural specialty assessment are unqualified.

Some specialties shall be revoked when the specialties are in the pre-warning list for three consecutive years or stop enrollment for even five consecutive years.

Secondly, it's necessary to strictly handle the procedures of pre-warning, stopping enrollment and revoking specialties.

Appropriate measures can be taken to deal with those pre-warning specialties, such as to reform within a limited time, to decrease the number of enrollments next year, to suspend the declaration of the undergraduate teaching projects involved in the specialty construction.

As for the specialties stopping enrollment, effective actions can be taken, such as to suspend the input of the basic construction of teaching, to suspend the introduction of new teachers, to suspend the declaration of the undergraduate teaching projects and teaching research projects involved in the specialty construction. Meanwhile, it's required that an overall rectification program should be put forward to reform those specialties of stopping enrollment. Only after the intramural evaluation of the rectification program is qualified can the universities resume recruiting students.

As to those revoked specialties, there are also some ways to cope with, such as to stop investing in the teaching basic construction as well as the funds, to stop introducing the new teachers, to stop declaring the undergraduate teaching projects and teaching research

projects together with the teaching achievements involved in the specialty construction. Moreover, it's necessary for those professional teachers to carry out job training or change of positions in accordance with the school regulations (Du, 2011). As a matter of fact, to implement the specialty pre-warning and withdrawal mechanism is not only associated with the related disciplinary development in the corresponding department, but also associated with vital interests and future of the related professional teachers. Consequently, if the universities want to put the mechanism into practice, great efforts and joint cooperation shall be made not only by those educational administrative departments, but also by those human resources, enrollment, employment and assets management departments. In that circumstance, those problems involved can be resolved effectively and appropriately so that it can contribute to thoroughly implementing the dynamic mechanism of specialty adjustment.

## CONCLUSION

Under the economic new normal, the appropriate specialty setting shall satisfy the following conditions or requirements: Chinese universities shall build a dynamic mechanism; the government shall duly carry out macro-control; and the universities shall effectively use their autonomy and scientifically analyze the social talents demands. When establishing, adjusting, or revoking a certain specialty, the universities shall have a full and strict demonstration based on the requirements of the national policies, the industrial restructuring and

the social market etc. to build and improve their inner management system. They also need to set up a special supervision and management department which can be in charge of the teaching quality of the newly-established specialty, and be responsible for having the specialty assessment regularly or irregularly. In addition, it also shall take responsibility for dealing with the exposed problems timely and effectively and make the appropriate adjustment. Only in this way, it can make the specialty adjustment more scientific and effective and helps ensure that the talent training of Chinese universities could greatly conform to the demands of our nation and the market development.

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