

Regulation and Transcendence: The Policy Guarantee Provided for Tuition-Free Normal University Students' Career Aspiration Education

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Abstract

The state tuition-free policy for normal university students has given basic requirements for the career aspiration education on the part of tuition-free normal university students, and has served as an important reason for effectively pushing forward tuition-free normal university students' career aspiration education. However, during the process of implementing this policy, many problems crop up. For example, the policy itself is not complete; the implementation is not effective; and there are not enough support and recognition for this policy. All these, to a certain extent, have hindered the realization of students' career aspirations to become outstanding teachers and educators. Therefore, we should continue to improve the state tuition-free policy for normal university students, strengthen the effectiveness of its implementation, and enhance students' recognition for this policy, thus achieving an organic unity of national needs, social needs and students' personal needs, as well as constructing good policy guarantee for the career aspiration education on the part of normal university students who are receiving free education.

Key words: Educational policy; Tuition-free normal university students; Career aspiration education

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INTRODUCTION

Education is the foundation for the tasks crucial for generations to come, while teachers are the cornerstone for the great cause of education. Since 2007, the Chinese Ministry of Education reintroduced the state tuition-free policy for normal universities directly under the Ministry of Education, and provided reference and guidance for the career aspiration education on the part of tuition-free normal university students. This policy, in this sense, is the policy guarantee for guiding the students onto the road of teacher's professional development, and is the policy safeguard for them to establish a career aspiration of teaching for a long term or for a life time, to make determination to be outstanding teachers and educators, and to devote themselves to protecting the motherland and the people.

1. POLICY: THE IMPORTANT REASON FOR CARRYING OUT CAREER ASPIRATION EDUCATION

Compared with other Chinese students, tuition-free normal university students face significantly different admission requirements, different training methods, training targets, and employment modes. This shows the prominent regulation and contractual features of the tuition-free policy. Since 2007, the Chinese government has issued a series of policies and documents on the selection, training, employment, and furthering studies of

normal university students receiving free education, which gives the basic requirements for their career aspiration education. Hence, these policies and documents have thus become the important reason for carrying out career aspiration education on the part of tuition-free normal university students.

1.1 Expounding Their Future Profession

The main purpose of the implementation of China's state tuition-free policy for normal university students is to train qualified teachers in basic education, so it points out that tuition-free normal university students' career aspiration education should guide the students to regard the teaching profession as their career goal. As is indicated in the "Employment Measures Taken for Tuition-free Students in the Teachers Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education", We should make it certain that the tuition-free normal university students will go to teach in primary and secondary schools upon graduation, and should also encourage outstanding students graduated from high schools to apply for teaching majors."¹ Moreover, the policy requires the students to return back to their hometown to teach for more than ten years. For the students who land a teaching job in cities and town, they should be appointed to teach in rural areas for at least two years by the administrative department of education in the local government. This provision is of great significant to cultivate numerous outstanding teachers for the Midwest, and has met the demand for teachers from the Midwest in the aspects of quantity and quality. In this sense, it, to some extent, has bridged the gap between the eastern coastal and western regions, and between the urban and rural areas in terms of education development, thus fully embodying that the Chinese government attaches great importance to the central and western regions, especially to the basic education in the rural areas.

1.2 Encouraging Students to Teach for a Long Time

It is both the basic requirement given by the state tuition-free policy for normal university students and the important content of the students' career aspiration education to guide them to firm the beliefs in teaching as well as to make determination to teach for a long time or for a life time. As is indicated in the "Measures for Carrying out Tuition-free Education for Students in the Teachers Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education (Trial)", we should select the excellent students graduated from high schools who are willing to be teaches and who like to teach for a long time or for a life time; besides, we should encourage more outstanding young people to be lifelong educators. ... Government at all levels should take effective measures, and give positive

¹ Employment Measures Taken for Tuition-free Students in the Teachers Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education. 2010-5-18

encouragement and support for students who have been engaged in primary and secondary education for a long time."² The person in charge of tuition-free teacher education in the Ministry of Education emphasized when interpreting the state policy, "three points should be maintained when formulating the "Employment Measures Taken for Tuition-free Students in the Teachers Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education" and "Measures Taken to Give the Students Graduated from Teachers Universities without Paying Tuition to Study for the Master of Education at their Post (Provisional)": First, we should encourage more outstanding high school graduates to apply for teaching majors, and train excellent teachers; second, we should ensure that the students will teach in primary and secondary schools upon graduation, and inspire outstanding young people to teach for a long time; third, we should take into full consideration the relevant policies on students' employment and on their pursuit of Master of Education, and promote education reform."³ The "Measures Taken to Give the Students Graduated from Teachers Universities without Paying Tuition to Study for the Master of Education at their Post(Provisional)" also specifies that teachers' professional ethics education should be enhanced when training the postgraduates who are studying for the Master of Education, so that they will establish the career aspiration and beliefs in long-term teaching.

1.3 Encouraging Them to Become Outstanding Teachers and Educators

It is the ultimate goal of the state tuition-free policy for normal university students to develop them into outstanding teachers and educators, which are also the fundamental task of the career aspiration education on the part of the normal university students receiving free education. In accordance with the "Measures for Providing Tuition-free Education to Students in Teachers Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education (Trial)", we should draw upon experience from the teachers universities directly under the Ministry of Education, establish a sound system, and thus lay the foundation for training a large number of outstanding teachers and educators. The teachers universities directly under the Ministry of Education should take advantage of the golden opportunity of providing tuition-free education to students majoring in teaching, and vigorously promote the teacher education reform by centering around the aim of training excellent teachers and educators. In particular,

² Measures for Carrying out Tuition-free Education for Students in the Teachers Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education (Tranl.). (2007). *Gazette of the State Council of the People's Republic of China*, (17).

³ The Interpretation of Employment Polices for the Tuition-free Students in the Teachers Universities by the Competent Personnel in the Department of Teacher Education. (2010). *China Education Daily*.

they should meticulously formulate teaching and training program in accordance with the requirements of the basic education development and curriculum reform.”³ The state should “support graduates to further their studies and pursue professional development on the basis of considering the circumstances of primary and secondary education. Through the training and education at the Master of Education level, the graduate students will be equipped with advanced educational concepts, with good work ethics and sense of innovation, and with solid professional knowledge base. Besides, they will also develop better abilities to reflect on their teaching practices. All these will lay a solid foundation for their future growth to be outstanding teachers and educators.”⁴

1.4 Advocating Students to Develop a Passion for Teaching

Having a passion for teaching is the prerequisite for tuition-free normal university students to become outstanding teachers and educators, is the core content of their career aspiration education, and is the important criterion for the national selection of students to major in teaching without tuition fees. On the graduation ceremony of the first batch of tuition-free normal university students, Wen Jiabao expressed four hopes to the students which were “loving heart, dedication, hard work and innovation”, encouraged them to love their students, love the teaching profession, and love education. Besides, according to the “Measures for Providing Tuition-free Education to Students in the Teachers Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education (Trial)”, any outstanding student who aspires to be teacher but is not in the teaching major could be allowed to transfer to the teaching major if it is in line with the plans approved by the Ministry of Education and the school. The tuition fees and accommodation fees as well as the living allowance should be repaid according to the standard of the school.”² In terms of the training methods, it is required to “enable students to establish advanced educational philosophy and develop a passion for education through training and education.”²

2. INEFFECTIVENESS OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: THE PROBLEM FACING THE CAREER ASPIRATION EDUCATION

The state tuition-free policy for normal university students plays a crucial role in the career aspiration education on the part of normal university students, while it also exposes a problem that there is less effective implementation of the policy, so the effects of career

aspiration education on the part of students has been largely reduced.

2.1 Unsound Employment Policy for Tuition-Free Normal University Students

Employment concerns the survival and development of the tuition-free normal university students, thus could impact students’ understanding towards the efficacy of the teaching work. In according with the state tuition-free policy for normal university students, local governments have autonomy in the charge of students’ employment, such as the organization and publication of employment information, creating jobs, giving them authorized size, approving trans-provincial employment, and examining behaviors in violation of the contract. However, it should be noted that the employment policies for tuition-free normal university students formulated by every province are not sound, which exerts negative impact on students’ feelings for the teaching work as well as on their beliefs in teaching.

2.1.1 The Policies on Trans-Provincial Employment Are not Unified

Although there is no specified “absolute prohibition” on trans-provincial employment in the employment policies of every province, there are great differences in the regulations for the students who go to other provinces to work and for the students who are not the local people but choose to work there. Some provinces refuse to accept the students from other provinces by means of the excuse of “talent surplus”; some provinces refuse to let the students go by saying that “they are in dire need of high-level teachers”; some provinces allow the students who have “special reasons” to work in other provinces, while there are different definitions for the “special reasons” in different provinces; some provinces give vague regulations for trans-provincial employment, and there is a lack of unified standard; some provinces provide that any trans-provincial employment shall be punished; and some provinces delay the processing of students’ application for trans-provincial employment for a long time, and try to avoid key issues. In addition, the procedures and formalities for the trans-provincial employment are cumbersome. We can even see the phenomenon that some provincial competent education departments shift their responsibilities to each other, which gives rise to numerous problems to students and employers in terms of trans-provincial employment, thus greatly affecting tuition-free normal university students’ pursuit of their career aspirations.

2.1.2 The Distribution of Jobs for Students Is Different

Although each province has provided jobs for tuition-free normal university students in compliance with the requirements of the state tuition-free policy, the distribution of jobs among the provinces is greatly different. For example, the jobs provided by some provinces are distributed in large and medium-sized

⁴ Measures Taken to Give the Students Graduated from Teachers Universities without Paying Tuition to Study for the Master of Education at their Post (Provisional) . 2010-5-21.

cities and small towns, while the jobs provided by others are mostly in rural areas. This leads to a problems that students from different hometown but in the same universities and majors will face different employment options. Moreover, some provinces do not pay enough attention to the employment of the students who are in certain disciplines. So in the job fairs for college graduates, no jobs are provided for them; they have to look for jobs by themselves, or they have to be assigned by the local education departments to the schools that they are not willing to go to. This phenomenon makes some students suffer from a great psychological letdown, and it even harms their beliefs in long-term teaching.

2.1.3 The Employment Modes of Students Are Significantly Different

Currently, most of the provinces have combined the “two-way choice” and “coordinated arrangement” for tuition-free normal university students when the students are seeking for jobs in accordance with the state tuition-free policy. In particular, some provinces even organized “supply and demand negotiation” activities on the internet and on the spot. However, there are some provinces, cities and counties who do not proceed in line with the requirements of the state tuition-free policy for the normal university students that the students do not need to participate in any employment examination; instead, they uphold the policy of “any recruitment shall be based on passing examinations”. In addition, some places only accept the students who are natives in order to reduce the pressure on job placement. These have seriously hampered the smooth employment of normal university students receiving free education, and have affected their pursuit of their ideal jobs.

2.2 Ineffectiveness of the Implementation of Tuition-Free Policy

It is the key to the formation of students' career aspirations that each training school as well as primary and secondary schools can effectively implement the state tuition-free policy for normal university students. However, we find that some schools failed to achieve so in varying degrees during the process of implementing the policy, which weakens the desired effects of students' career aspiration education.

2.2.1 Incorrect Understanding of the Policy

Since the implementation of the state tuition-free policy for normal university students, every school has centralized their quality education resources and have actively innovated the teacher training models, which effectively promote the formation and development of students' career aspirations. Nevertheless, during the process, some faculty leaders and teachers did not establish correct understanding towards the importance of the policy. They believe that tuition-free normal university

students and other students are only different in terms of their income and employment arrangement, thus they hold that there is no need to adjust the training mode for tuition-free normal university students. So they still follow the traditional training concepts and models. All these understandings have restricted the formation and development of students' career aspirations.

2.2.2 Failures in Implementing the Policy

According to surveys, some primary and secondary schools are unwilling to train tuition-free normal university students and loathe to accept trainee internship for the sake of their own professional development; some schools suppose that such students are the same as the students in other teachers universities, so they are unwilling to accept the normal university graduates who receives free education; besides, several primary and secondary schools do not agree the students to pursue the postgraduate studies by using the excuse that it will do harm to the work; others, while agreeing the students to do so, do not give the students the learning time. These phenomena have also affected the formation and development of tuition-free normal university students' career aspirations in varying degrees.

2.3 Lack of Recognition for the Policy From Some Students

Only if the tuition-free normal university students truly recognize the career aspirations in line with the state tuition-free policy for normal university students can the career aspirations turn into the inner spiritual power for the students to make the aspirations into reality. However, some students do not agree with the policy, which makes them unwilling to regard the teaching profession as their career aspirations.

2.3.1 Their Understanding on the Objectives of the Policy Is Vague

Surveys have found that the main reasons for the students to be tuition-free normal university students are as follows: first, they like to be a teacher, and the teaching work is their ideal career (31.3%); second, their family economic condition is not good, so their choice can reduce the family burden (26.6%); third, their parents and relatives encourage them to do so (21.3%); fourth, random selection (10.4%); fifth, graduates have great difficulty in finding jobs, while their choice can ensure them jobs (8.0%); sixth, they are under the influence of their primary and secondary school teachers (1.7%); seventh, they are under the influence of the students who are also tuition-free normal university students (0.7%). This shows that some students do not have a good understanding of the objectives of the policy when they are choosing majors and designing their career, but are influenced by other external factors. So there is great uncertainty for them to establish and realize their teaching career aspirations.

2.3.2 Their Opinions on the Rights and Obligations Provided in the Policy Are Different

There are many regulations in the state tuition-free policy for normal university students. However, due to the impact of market economy which values interests, some students attach much importance to the social status and economical interests of their jobs, so they speak highly of the rights provided in the policy, but show little support to the obligations in it. For example, 85.8 percent of the students praise the “right” that tuition-free normal university students can apply for the postgraduate study without taking entrance examinations after teaching in primary and secondary schools for one year, but 68.7% of the students do not approve the “obligation” that they shall not apply for full-time postgraduate study before graduation and during the period specified in the contract. In particular, some students even think that signing the contract of receiving free education is just like signing a contract of selling themselves, for they will lose the freedom of choosing careers. All these have seriously hindered the establishment and achievement of students’ teaching career aspirations.

3. TRANSCENDENCE: THE APPROACHES TO CONDUCTING CAREER ASPIRATION EDUCATION

The fundamental reason for the ineffective implementation of the state tuition-free policy for normal university students is that this policy focuses much on the state interests and social demand, but shows little concern to the legitimate demands from the students. In this sense, in order to improve the effectiveness of students’ career aspiration education, we should change or transcend the present policy, and achieve an organic unity among the state interests, social demand, and the legitimate demands from the tuition-free normal university students.

3.1 Improving the Tuition-Free Policy for Normal University Students

Reasonable and sound tuition-free policy for normal university students can provide favorable institution environment to students, thus it can serve as a policy guarantee to ensure that tuition-free normal university students could establish and achieve their career aspirations in terms of becoming outstanding teachers and educators. To the end, the State should adjust and improve the unreasonable content of the present policy: first, sound employment policies for tuition-free normal university students should be formulated so as to achieve a good unity among the national, social and personal needs, as well as to help them land a job smoothly. Besides, the State should lift the restrictions on students who are required to come back to hometown to teach upon graduation. Instead, the requirement should be changed

to be a relaxed one so that they can teach in any public school. Furthermore, the State should further improve the policies on job distribution, employment modes, and employment insurance, and should not formulate or implement the policies that do harm to students’ legitimate interests and hamper their employment. In addition, a strict accountability system for tuition-free normal university students’ employment should be established. Second, it is important to establish an operable withdraw mechanism. We should respect students’ choices on their majors, hold strict interview before recruitment, and put major emphasis on examining whether the students have strong yearning for being teachers, and whether the job-personnel match is reasonable, so we can exclude the students who are not willing or are not eligible to teach in advance. For the students who have worked in schools for some time after graduation but find themselves not suitable for the teaching work, they could be allowed to withdraw from the teaching profession. Third, the State can build a special subsidy and reward system for rural primary and secondary school teachers, earnestly improve the income of the teachers in rural areas, and fundamentally solve the problem that tuition-free normal university students refuse to work in schools in rural areas due to the lower income, thus the students could be financially guaranteed to teach in rural areas for a long time.

3.2 Strengthening the Implementation of the Tuition-Free Policy

The effectiveness of the state tuition-free policy for normal university students is dependent on good implementation of the policy itself. Each school who is responsible for training students should be fully aware of the importance of the policy to the career aspiration education on the part of the tuition-free normal university students, should strictly implement the policy, as well as launch teacher and education reform by centering on the objective of training excellent teachers and educators. In particular, the schools should meticulously formulate training programs in accordance with the requirements of the basic education and curriculum reform. Apart from this, they should arrange top teachers to teach the tuition-free normal university students, should select high-level teachers to teach education courses, and should build a tutor system for the students. In addition, they should enhance students’ teaching ethics education, as well as strengthen their teaching practice. To the end, the system that tuition-free normal university students should undergo six-month internship in primary and secondary schools should be improved. Through such training, the students are hoped to establish advanced educational philosophy, to love the teaching work, as well as to form the career aspirations of long-term teaching. This will lay a solid foundation for them to be outstanding teachers and educators. Primary and secondary schools are the places

where tuition-free normal university students work, and are the schools that provide training practice to students. They should include the training of the students into their work schedules, provide internship opportunities for students, and help students understand the teaching profession and understand the role of teachers as soon as possible. Moreover, they should support them to continue their studies, so that students will continuously improve their theoretical knowledge and teaching ability, reflect on themselves in educational practices, and become outstanding teachers and educators as soon as possible.

3.3 Enhancing Students' Recognition for the Tuition-Free Policy

Tuition-free normal university students are the main subjects to enjoy the rights and fulfill the obligations given by the state tuition-free policy. Their implementation of the policy determines whether the objectives of the policy could be achieved, and also determines the outcome of students' career aspiration education. In this sense, only by truly understanding and recognizing the essence of the tuition-free policy can the normal university students receiving free education combine their personal ideals with the requirements of the policy, can they constantly

internalized the positive factors within their own career aspiration education into their own needs, and can they give full play to the potential of accomplishing their career aspirations. Career aspiration education should not only make the students get to know the equal status of the rights and obligations given by the state tuition-free policy, and guide them to enjoy the rights such as receiving free education, living subsidies, and securing future jobs, but also make them consciously dedicated to the cause of education, guide them to recognize the state tuition-free policy, and enable them to have a profound understanding of the fundamental purpose and significance of the policy, so that they can take initiative to shoulder the social and historical responsibilities, associate their personal ideals with the demands of state development and social progress, and make unremitting efforts to be outstanding teachers and educators at an early date.

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