

THE ORIENTATION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION OF CHINA'S UNIVERSITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: Entrepreneurship education is an important solution to the employment difficulty of university graduates by guiding them to organize a new business venture. Entrepreneurship can be regarded as an “employment dilator”, helping people to get self-employed. However, the low successful rate in business ventures of university graduates in China, to much degree, prevents them from starting up businesses, resulting in failure in enlarging employment through business creation. To solve the problem, this paper argues that it is very necessary for Chinese universities to introduce sustainable development ideas to their entrepreneurship education and re-orientate the education objectives, content and methodology of entrepreneurship education. PS: This paper is supported by the Humanistic and Sociological Research Program of the Ministry of Education in PRC (09YJA880030).

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship education is an important solution to the employment difficulty of university graduates by guiding them to start up businesses by themselves. Entrepreneurship can be regarded as an “employment dilator”, helping people to get self-employed. With regard to Chinese university graduates, they have strong entrepreneurial awareness and desire, but their success in enterprise is very low, which is proved by the research project: the Student-oriented Cultivation Model of Sustainable Development Entrepreneurship—a study of Simulated Enterprise Experiment on Campus. The research group surveyed 1103 undergraduates from 29 provinces across China by questionnaire and they answered 27 questions about university students' entrepreneurship. The result reveals that 72.71% graduates considered starting up business, 5.62% graduates have started their business, 0.91% graduates are successful in their enterprise. In addition, the research on graduates' enterprise conducted by University Student Affairs Section of China's Ministry of Education in 2009 shows that, among graduates' self-opened businesses, 23% of them are well-managed with healthy development, 31.4% of them are in stable operation with a basic balance between revenue and expenditures, 24.9% of them is thinking about switch in business or closing business, 20.7% of them have already closed their business, nearly half of these entrepreneurs are not satisfied with their business situation[1]. The above figures indicate that graduate entrepreneurs usually lack the operation and management ability of business in terms of sustainable development. Therefore, to promote university students' sustainable entrepreneurship is an important objective of entrepreneurship education at universities. The realization of that objective needs the overall reform of entrepreneurship education, building up a new idea of sustainable development and reviewing entrepreneurship education objectives, content and methodology.

1.1. Research Topic

Reorientation of entrepreneurship education at universities in the context of sustainable development strategy

1.2. Specific Research Issues

- To analyze the status quo, the existing problems and the cause of current entrepreneurship education at China's universities, introducing sustainable development ideas to the entrepreneurship education at Chinese universities.

- To re-orientate the entrepreneurship education objectives, content and methodology based on sustainable development ideas
- To draw wide attention to the cultivation of entrepreneurship for Chinese university students

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is based on the sustainable development theory, which formed in 1980s. Lester Russel Brown, an American environmentalist, founder of the Worldwatch Institute, firstly systemically elaborated the sustainable development theory in his book *Building a Sustainable Society* in 1981. Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report, from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, published in 1987, defines the meaning of sustainable development as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [2]." This new idea was soon recognized and accepted all over the world. At the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in 1992, 172 governments voted to adopt the program Agenda 21, which is a set of proposals for the furtherance of world-wide sustainable development, thereby the world enters the era of sustainable development [3].

Sustainable development ideas, originated from ecological environment focusing on the relationship between human and nature, has gradually reached every corner of social and economic development, emphasizing the relationship between human and the whole society with more attention paid to its development ideas and framework principles. The Global Higher Education Sustainable Development Organization points out that given to different culture, economy, political background and local environment where the university is located, sustainable development has different meanings and contains different content [4].

Sustainable development ideas were introduced into Chinese higher education at the end of 20th century. Sustainable development of higher education refers to the initiative to absorb the basic idea and principle of sustainable development and take it as guideline for the reform and development of higher education, featuring sustainable and coordinating development and the control of the development process. Its connotation is to make the development meet both the needs of itself constant development and the needs of social sustainable development strategy [5].

The higher education, as a main channel of cultivating various talents in China, has accepted sustainable development ideas and tries to meet the objective requirement of social sustainable development. Its core step is to cultivate talents' sustainable, stable and coordinating competence. What is aimed at in entrepreneurship education is to cultivate students' competence of integrating entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurship and make them develop in coordinating way. In this way, students, when starting business, can face up to problems, analyze problems and solve problems, and their business can survive and develop.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research is conducted by means of literature study, deductive inference, and qualitative analysis. By using literature study, we have consulted papers and researches relevant to sustainable development theory and analyzed the situation of introducing sustainable development ideas to higher education and the study status on it. Through deductive approach, it comes out that it is necessary to introduce the sustainable development idea into entrepreneurship education of higher education. On basis of that we analyze the existing problems and their causes by employing qualitative analysis. At last, guided by the system theory, we make analysis and inference, followed by the solution to the problems.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Yang Yiyi, professor, head of higher education institute, Shenzheng University, deems that sustainable development is both the starting point and the final destination of 21st higher education [6]. Entrepreneurship education, important part of higher education, should absorb sustainable development idea and re-orientate its objective, content and methodology.

4.1. Education Objective Orientation - Highlighting Sustainable Development Entrepreneurship

Lei Jiaxiao, professor, deputy dean of National Entrepreneurship Research Center, Tsinghua University, points out that many Chinese universities have a vague orientation of entrepreneurship education and it is quite common that the education often has the inclination of utilitarianism value. The entrepreneurship education course for students tends to be designed and organized like a quickie training course for entrepreneurs. The activities organized for the entrepreneurship education of students is often misunderstood as the establishment of various kinds of "student's startup companies" and as the cultivation of "student boss". This "making the rice shoots grow by pulling them up", as described by a Chinese idiom, obviously does not conform the sustainable development of modern society and cannot achieve the sustainable, stable and coordinating development in the process of the graduates' start-ups[7]. The solution to the problem is to establish the sustainable development value instead of the utilitarianism value in the entrepreneurship education objective, that is, to cultivate the sustainable development entrepreneurship of students.

The sustainable development entrepreneurship refers to the knowledge, personality trait and capacity required of entrepreneurs in starting up and developing enterprises, in other words, the joint force of entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurship, in which personality trait and capacity play a core role.

From the perspective of the development of startup enterprises, many enterprises are likely to encounter various management

problems such as personnel management, project choice, market expansion, resource allocation etc. Because of the poor management, many enterprises experience hard times and suffer setbacks, even close down. The research group has investigated 20 successful enterprises started by university graduates from 17 higher education institutes of Hebei province and found that these enterprises all suffered setbacks and difficulties in their startup and development, but it is their excellent personality traits and entrepreneurship that help them to get out of the difficult situation. It can be seen that the enterprise leader, namely, entrepreneur's subjective resources, is the core element in startup enterprise, which should become the basic subjective of entrepreneurship education.

4.2. Entrepreneurship Education content Orientation - Focusing on Entrepreneur's Subjective Resources

Enterprise resources are an important factor for the successful enterprise, divided into subjective resources and objective resources. The former indicates the resources that can be obtained through training and development such as entrepreneur's entrepreneurial spirit, personality traits, entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial ability, entrepreneurial awareness; while objective resources means policy, location, fund, education, information which entrepreneur are unable to control or possess without the help of the society and other people.

At present, Chinese university graduates have never had the best objective resources in the history. Both the central government and local government at various levels have issued preferential policies, established venture fund for university graduates, set up venture incubation parks, held university student entrepreneurship forum, providing workable environment resources for university graduates to start up and develop business of their own. However, the successful rate of Chinese university graduates' ventures is quite low due to insufficient subjective resources of entrepreneurs and their lack of sustainable development entrepreneurship, which may result from the misplacement of entrepreneurship education at China's higher education institutes.

The entrepreneurship education content of Chinese universities is mainly made up of entrepreneurship courses and entrepreneurial practice activities. With regard to the entrepreneurship course, it does not draw much attention in entrepreneurship education and its course setup remains at preliminary stage, lacking systematization and standardization. Many universities and colleges are keen on entrepreneurial activities and practice, whereas entrepreneurship course setup is restricted to employment guidance and career planning. Only few universities which are appointed by the Ministry of Education as entrepreneurship education demonstration centers have more mature and regular courses such as Tsinghua university, Beijing University of Aeronautics & Astronautics and Renmin University of China of People .

Tsinghua University offers a series of courses related to entrepreneurship like Entrepreneurial Management, New Product Development, Technological Strategy, Intellectual Property Right, Entrepreneur and Innovation, which focus on the study and the cultivation of entrepreneurial management knowledge and skills. The entrepreneurship courses of Beijing University of Aeronautics & Astronautics can be classified into three classifications: theoretical courses, practical courses and comprehensive courses, mainly consisting of Entrepreneurial Management, Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Venturing,

Approaches to Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Bible, Entrepreneurial Orientation (Company's Enterprise and Value Creation), Career Planning and Employment Guiding for Undergraduates, Entrepreneurship Basis and Practice, technological enterprise. These courses highlight the overall promotion of Entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. Remin University of China's relevant courses emphasize the cultivation of entrepreneurship and enterprise skills such as Entrepreneurial Management, Entrepreneurship, Establishment and Development of Venture Enterprises, Venture Investment.

With reference to entrepreneurial activity and practice, participation in business planning contest and building the enterprise park of university students have become the main body of the practice. Unfortunately only few students can take part in the business planning contest, which makes the contest gradually become elite education. In addition, the contest result is often related to student's postgraduate entrance examination, evaluation of the school, resulting in the contest with the inclination of utilitarianism. On the other hand, the criteria for the contest gives more attention to the business planning rather than the business itself and the business planning presents the common features of "new technology, large fun, high starting point, big scale and fast speed" which seems separated from the reality [8]. Moreover, the university enterprise park tends to emphasize the site of place and fund, overlook or weaken its service function for the enterprises.

The above phenomena show that the current entrepreneurship education at Chinese universities "is mainly limited to the operation and skill facets, leading to the separation between entrepreneurship education and specialty education and basic knowledge education, presuming that what going to business venture requires is just the master of certain skill or technique" [9]. The entrepreneurship education completely restricted to operation facet may lead China's higher education to astray and make talent innovation and entrepreneurship exhausted. This understanding and practice are more likely to ignore the in-depth basis of innovation and entrepreneurship and simply regard innovation and entrepreneurship as skill and operation.

Therefore, it is very necessary for the entrepreneurship education of Chinese universities to re-orientate its education content, that is, to switch from entrepreneurial technology and entrepreneurial practice activity to the promotion of entrepreneur's subjective resources, namely, the integration of entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial skill and entrepreneurship. In the first place, the education position of entrepreneurship course should be elevated, relying mainly on entrepreneurship course teaching and learning while making entrepreneurial practice activities subsidiary, because entrepreneurial skills without the support of entrepreneurial knowledge cannot work properly or last for a long time. In the second place, the entrepreneurship course should be set up systematically and scientifically. Based on the sustainable entrepreneurship structure, entrepreneurship courses, basic courses and specialized courses should be properly integrated so as to form a curriculum system beneficial to fostering innovation and creativity. In the third place, entrepreneurial skill training should not be taken as the sole objective in entrepreneurial practice activities. In addition, entrepreneurial practice activities are not only the channel of cultivating entrepreneurial skills, but, even more, the practice platform whereby entrepreneurial knowledge convert into entrepreneurial skills.

4.3. Entrepreneurship Education Methodology Re-orientation - Emphasizing the Cultivation of Competence

Education methodology, namely, the technical means of helping people to understand and explore education theory and practice and its law, often depends on education ideas and social value. China's higher education, taken as specialized education, focuses on discipline system and pays attention to the horizontal and vertical connection of knowledge. This value orientation is reflected in teaching method which is knowledge-infused and teaching-oriented, neglecting the cultivation of students' competence and autonomous learning. Likewise this problem is also reflected in the entrepreneurship education at universities and the students educated in this way obviously cannot meet the needs of society for the talents with sustainable development entrepreneurship when sustainable development becomes part of the society. It is urgent to re-orientate education method based on the competence-oriented cultivation.

What are the characteristics of the talent with sustainable development entrepreneurship? He should be able to be independent in his thinking, good at learning, rational in his decision, unceasing in innovation, brave enough to face up to difficulties and to take risks, which are good qualities entrepreneurs need to keep startup business surviving and developing.

In order to meet the needs of the society for the talents with sustainable development entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education methodology should adjust his conventional teaching method, converting from knowledge-infused teaching model to learning-method-oriented model, from teacher's teaching-centered to the effective combination of both teaching's teaching and students learning, from classroom teaching-centered to the effective combination of both classroom teaching and practice training. The constructive advice is as follows:

First of all, it is importance of changing teacher's ideas about the function of teacher, from being an instructor to a guider or facilitator. Chinese famous educator Tao Xingzhi said: "teachers' responsibility does not lie in teaching but in teaching learning, teaching students how to learn" [10]. Edgar Fold, world famous futurologist, points out that the future illiterate are not those who are unable to read and write but those who have not learned how to learn [11]. Thus, the teacher, as a guider, should pilot students to observe and think themselves, to analyze things and to make judgment independently and give them more encouragement and support.

Then, more attention is paid to promoting teachers' quality and to seeking more channels to develop the resources of entrepreneurial teachers. Generally speaking, the teacher engaged in entrepreneurship education should have entrepreneurial experience. However, most such teachers in China do not have entrepreneurial experiences and their relevant knowledge is limited, who are likely to simplify and technicalize entrepreneurship training. For the problem, on the one hand, the teachers should go to the society, to engage themselves in all kinds of enterprise activities, to rich their knowledge and experience of entrepreneurship apart from constantly attending systematical training courses. On the other hand, the school can invite successful businessmen and entrepreneurs to undertake some entrepreneurial practice course and to guide or help students with entrepreneurial practice activities, which is an effective way to make up for the shortage of teaching staff in entrepreneurship education.

5. CONCLUSION

21st century is the era of knowledge innovation and sustainable development as well as the times of talents pushing society's development and progress. Higher education, as the base of cultivating various talents, should make full use of its advantage in educating talents and provide qualified talents for the social development, in particular, the talents with sustainable development entrepreneurship, hence playing a vanguard role in sustainable society. In this case, China's entrepreneurship education should adopt sustainable development notion and re-orientate the entrepreneurship education's objective, content and methodology.

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