

# The Connotation, Problems and Case Analysis of Self-evaluation in Colleges and Universities

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**Abstract:** Self-evaluation is one of the main contents of internal quality assurance, as well as an important way to improve quality. On the basis of clarifying the connotation of self-evaluation in colleges and universities, this study analyzes the problems existing in self-evaluation, and takes the "Two-Three-Four-Five" self-evaluation system of Southwest Petroleum University (SWPU) as a case to summarize its framework, practice effect and experience. The self-evaluation system can provide reference for other colleges and universities when they are constructing their own self-evaluation systems.

**Keyword:** Self-evaluation, internal quality assurance, external evaluation.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Self-evaluation in inspection policy has become a global phenomenon[1]. As one of the main contents of the original form of quality assurance and the current quality assurance system, self-evaluation is of great significance and it is the basis of the overall evaluation of higher education. It is not only the effective mechanism of self-development, self-restriction and self-perfection under the premise of giving full play to college autonomy, but also consciously accepting the foundation from the supervision of the government and society[2]. In 1994 a research project with respect to internal quality assurance in Dutch universities was completed[3]. After 30 years of dramatic educational reform, China has established a nationwide evaluation system for evaluating its higher education institutions[4]. The Chinese government has attached great importance to self-evaluation, integrated it into the top-level design and issued a system document at the national level. In the "Ministry of Education's Comments about Undergraduate Teaching Evaluation in Colleges and Universities", it clearly states that "the government will establish and improve the school based teaching evaluation system to adapt to the modern higher education system with Chinese characteristics, which is based on self-evaluation, takes college evaluation, professional accreditation and evaluation, international evaluation, and monitoring of normal teaching data as its main contents, and combined with the multiple evaluation of government, colleges, specialized agencies, and society"[5]. Nowadays quality is the main theme of colleges and universities. As the core of internal quality assurance in colleges and universities, self-evaluation is in a fundamental position[6]. More and more colleges and universities have become increasingly aware of the importance of self-evaluation. They have paid more and more attention to self-evaluation and regarded it as an important way to improve quality. However, there are still a lot of problems in self-evaluation in practice. For example, self-evaluation is overly dependent on external evaluation and can not effectively exert the independent function of self-evaluation. The index systems and standards of self-evaluation in colleges and universities are mostly consistent with external evaluation, and the internal evaluation based on subject specialty and teaching quality is still not perfect, lacking of scientific and reasonable evaluation system[7]. At present most colleges and universities are facing the general problem, lacking of quality culture. This paper mainly analyzes the connotation of self-evaluation, combs the main problems existing in current self-evaluation in colleges and universities, and uses case study method to summarize the framework, practice effect and experience of an actual case. This study can help clarify the connotation of self-evaluation further, provide useful reference to establish, perfect self-evaluation system and internal quality assurance for relevant colleges and universities, and provide reference for relevant research and practice.

## II. THE CONNOTATION OF SELF-EVALUATION IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Self-evaluation and external evaluation are relative concepts. Self-evaluation is an evaluation for the problems in education and teaching, which takes higher education institutions themselves as evaluation objects, on the basis of evaluation theories, methods, and relevant evaluation criterias[8]. External evaluation is an evaluation activity carried by other subjects outside the college, based on relevant evaluation criterias, theories, and methods, such as audit evaluation, professional certification, and third-party evaluation, etc.. The main body of self-evaluation is colleges and universities, while the main body of external evaluation comes from the outside. Self-evaluation is the most fundamental purpose of improving quality, and it is the process of self-diagnosis, self-discipline, self-improvement, and self-development, which is the self-accountability for the quality of colleges and universities. There is a certain difference among school based self-evaluation, government based evaluation and society based evaluation, including the evaluation purposes, criteria, and methods. And the fundamental difference is that school based self-evaluation regards the college as the main body to carry on the value judgment to its own educational management practice activity[9].

Self-evaluation can be divided into three kinds according to the purpose. One kind is "certified" self-evaluation, which is used as a process of external evaluation. Another is "self-discipline" self-evaluation, what is carried out their own evaluation based on its situation, without external compulsory. The other is "policy-based" self-evaluation, which is a quality assurance system of higher education at the national level, and it implements self-evaluation based on regulations and policy documents[10]. According to the classification, the self-evaluation in this study is the second type, which is the "self-discipline" self-evaluation. The study argues that the "self-discipline" self-evaluation is based on the conscious recognition of the importance of colleges and universities, takes the initiative to establish the appropriate evaluation system according to the actual situation, and forms normal and cyclical self-evaluation mechanism. It reflects the connotation of internal quality assurance fully, and highlights the awareness of the main body of internal quality assurance in colleges and universities.

A research has suggested that self-evaluation in colleges and universities mainly includes the whole quality evaluation, college teaching work evaluation, professional and curriculum construction evaluation, and teachers' teaching quality evaluation, etc.[11]. The research considers that it should also include the functional departments quality assurance evaluation. Because quality assurance activities require the participation of the whole college, in addition to schools, teachers, and students, but also including functional departments. Therefore self-evaluation includes the above six objects. The whole quality evaluation is an evaluation of the overall quality of teaching in a university or a college and it is a comprehensive evaluation of teaching quality. The evaluation results can reflect the level of teaching. The college teaching work evaluation is the evaluation of teaching work carried out by schools to understand the overall teaching level of themselves. The professional construction evaluation and curriculum construction evaluation are respectively for these two main objects, the profession and curriculum, so as to recognize the level of professional construction and curriculum construction. The teachers' teaching quality evaluation is focusing on the main body of teachers and conducts quality evaluation on teachers' teaching to measure the quality of teaching. The functional departments quality assurance evaluation is based on quality assurance responsibilities, and focuses on the quality assurance capabilities and level of functional departments, to recognize how functional departments carry out the quality assurance work.

## III. THE CURRENT PROBLEMS OF SELF-EVALUATION IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

### *A. Lacking in Awareness of Self-evaluation, and Distorted the Relationship with External Evaluation:*

According to the above classification of self-evaluation in colleges and universities, most colleges and universities adopt the "certified" self-evaluation instead of the "self-discipline" self-evaluation nowadays. The "certified" self-evaluation limits the autonomy of colleges and universities, and the "self-discipline" self-evaluation is consistent with the connotation of the current internal quality assurance in colleges and universities. Self-evaluation should be an important way of self-diagnosis, self-restraint, and self-improvement for colleges and universities, whose purpose is to promote quality. However, colleges and universities have not recognized self-evaluation deeply and distorted the nature of self-evaluation in practice. For the purpose of external evaluation, self-evaluation becomes a stage or link of external evaluation, which is attached to external evaluation and forced to conduct only when external evaluation needs. Due to the impact of external evaluation, internal evaluation procedures and methods in colleges and universities are consistent with their external evaluation, so that self-evaluation has become a replica and rehearsal of external evaluation.

***B. Self-evaluation System Rre Mostly Copied from Others, Lack of School-based Awareness:***

Self-evaluation system is used to define the scope of self-evaluation, as well as the procedures, methods, and standards, etc.. But self-evaluation system are mostly copied from others. There are two steps to construct self-evaluation system. Firstly, they check out whether there are relevant or authoritative external evaluation projects set by educational authorities. If there are, they will copy the evaluation system directly as their self-evaluation system. If not, they will continue to turn to the second step, which is that referring to other colleges and makes it become their own self-evaluation system after a little changes. In the process of constructing self-evaluation system, they are only referring to others and don't consider their own actual conditions fully, lacking in school-based awareness and development awareness, and do not consider the purpose, significance, process, and application of self-evaluation from their actual needs.

***C. Improvements after Self-evaluation Don't Do Well, and PDCA Cycle is Not Closed:***

The self-evaluation operates in a recurring cycle of PDCA, which is "Plan-Do-Check-Act" cycle. Act means improvement, which is not only the end of self-evaluation, but also a new starting point to promote continuous improvement and development of self-evaluation. In practice these Plan, Do and Check stages do well, while Act phase does not do well. The management mode of most colleges and universities is teaching operation as the main line, which focuses on ensuring the orderly operation of teaching, and has not developed to quality assurance as the core. With the management mode, self-evaluation is mostly linear. The general self-evaluation ends with the completion of the Check phase, ignoring the Act stage, so that PDCA cycle is not closed. Such a mode of operation can easily lead to the situation, what is problems found in previous evaluations are still problems in subsequent evaluations and the problems found in each evaluation are the same and have not improved.

***D. Self-evaluation Floats at the College Level and Does not Reach the Schools, Teachers and Students:***

Self-evaluation is regarded as the category of administrative power in colleges and universities, running from top to bottom with administrative orders. In actual operation, college is institution of evaluation and schools are assessed objects. At the college level, important meetings have been held within the whole college to arrange the evaluation stuff, which indicates the great attitude to evaluation. However, schools do not pay enough attention to this work, and have not released the importance as college. Schools are often struggling to cope, and do it just as a job. And this work is usually done by some staffs who are arranged by the leaders of schools. It is lacking in discussion and do not have the consensus on the faculty and students. Such an evaluation method does not really touch the college staffs, and the college does not know the views of teachers and students. It is only floating at the college level, does not truly reflect the status quo of schools, and can not find the real problems, so that the effect of self-evaluation is often contrary to the original intention.

***E. Self-evaluation is Lacking in Quality Culture:***

Quality culture is an important foundation and ideological guarantee for self-evaluation. But Self-evaluation lacks quality culture in fact. The evaluation objects treat self-evaluation as an extra job and burden, and self-evaluation does not go deep into the actual work. Self-evaluation does not internalize the common pursuit and conscientious behavior of all staffs and students in the college. There is no good atmosphere for them to participate in quality construction and quality assurance. Teachers and students do not realize the importance of internal quality assurance and self-evaluation, and they don't have the consciousness to be the master of higher education quality assurance. It has seriously affected the effectiveness and quality of self-evaluation, resulting in poor self-evaluation, which can not meet the stakeholders' interest demands.

**IV. CASE STUDY: THE "TWO-THREE-FOUR-FIVE" SELF-EVALUATION IN SWPU*****A. The Framework of "Two-Three-Four-Five" Self-evaluation:***

SWPU combines the self-evaluation with undergraduate professional training program revision, and takes it as an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive evaluation. After a long period of exploration and practice, the university has formed the "Two-Three-Four-Five" self-evaluation, which means two levels, three objects, four dimensions, and five principles. According to the principle of separation of evaluation from management, the university established a quality assurance and coordination management organization among the university, departments and teaching units, which is the Teaching Quality Management Committee (TQMC). And Department of Teaching Evaluation has been set up as a standing evaluation and coordination institution. Under the guidance of the principal and TQMC, guided by "Four Dimensions" and "Five Principles", and based on the undergraduate teaching quality monitoring and evaluation system, Department of Teaching Evaluation carries out self-evaluation of "Two Levels" and "Three Objects".

In the "Two-Three-Four-Five" self-evaluation, two stands for two levels, the college level and schools level, and it embodies that the schools are in the main position in personnel training. Three means three objects, which are teaching evaluation, learning evaluation, and management evaluation. And four indicates four dimensions, which includes the adaptability between the orientation of a college and personnel training objectives and the national and regional economic and social development needs, the protection of teachers and teaching resources, the effectiveness of internal quality assurance, and the satisfaction of students and social employers. Five is on behalf of five principles, and they are the principles of unity of internal evaluation and external evaluation, objectiveness and effectiveness, subjectivity and positivism, and orientation and motivation, as well as scientificity and feasibility.

### ***B. The Practice of "Two-Three-Four-Five" Self-evaluation:***

According to the actual situation and its own needs, SWPU promulgated and implemented the "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Implementation of Self-evaluation of Undergraduate Teaching" and other series of documents. It regards self-evaluation as the main method to improve quality, and conducts normal monitoring of the internal quality. Through various forms of preaching and training, self-evaluation has been promoted consciously from system regulation to culture. In the long-term practice, the three concepts of "Student Centred", "Outcome-based Education" and "Continuous Quality Improvement" have gradually become the consensus of all staffs of SWPU. It has been integrated into the formulation of undergraduate professional personnel training program and runs through the whole process of personnel training, so that teachers and students have formed the sense of ownership of internal quality assurance, changed their view on internal quality assurance, consciously formed the consciousness of anxiety about education quality, and enhanced the awareness of quality service.

The university implements the two-level management system, and promotes the shift of management center, divides the limits of authority and responsibility between college and schools scientifically and reasonably, and strengthens that the schools are in the main position at the same time. And it conducts the normal self-evaluation at two levels. At the college level, self-evaluation runs by PDCA cycle. At Plan stage, the major problems in quality construction should be further studied and self-evaluation projects should be formulated. During Do phase, evaluation activities such as curriculum evaluation, professional evaluation, teaching quality evaluation, and college undergraduate teaching evaluation should be conducted. At Check and Act phases, they conscientiously summed up and analyzed the reasons, informed the evaluation situation with the "Evaluation and Supervision Work Briefing" as a vehicle, and urged relevant departments to improve their work and conduct follow-up inspections of these existing problems. At the schools level, self-evaluation focuses on the three dimension of teaching process, which are beforehand control, halfway control, and post action control. At beforehand control, the objects of self-evaluation are training programs, syllabus, teaching materials, test proposition, internship arrangements, and thesis topics, etc.. At halfway control, the supervisory objects includes teachers' teaching, students' learning, thesis guidance, students internships, and other activities. At post action control, the objects of evaluation, feedback and improvement are teachers' teaching, students' learning, course exam, graduation project, and experiment practice, etc..

In the aspect of teaching evaluation, taking curriculum construction evaluation as an example. It mainly evaluates the curriculum target, teaching syllabus, curriculum teachers, teaching content, teaching research, teaching management, and teaching effect, etc.. There are three stages, which are curriculum self-evaluation, evaluation by teaching units and university, and the curriculums formulate rectification programs. According to the rectification situation, On the one hand, the university will supervise these teaching units to carry out rectification programs. On the other hand, it will carry out special evaluations in a targeted manner to ensure continuous improvement of these curriculums' construction. For learning evaluation, take the graduation project evaluation as an example. In spring semester, schools arrange self-examination on graduation project, then Academic Affairs Office organize opening reports, mid-term examination, thesis defense, and other kinds of quality control. During fall semester, Department of Teaching Evaluation carry out special evaluations on graduation theses. And the main contents of evaluation are including academic level, writing ability and quality. Through the whole process of self-evaluation of graduation theses, the university can detect problems, improve these problems timely, and insure the quality effectively. In the aspect of management evaluation, taking the functional departments quality assurance evaluation as an example. At first, all departments conduct self-evaluation according to the evaluation requirements, sort out the problems and deficiencies one by one, and propose solutions and suggestions. Then they carry out construction to ensure the effectiveness of quality assurance of each unit.

The undergraduate teaching quality monitoring and evaluation system of SWPU is made up of the undergraduate teaching basic state database, evaluation system, and data monitoring system. It not only meets the need of reporting to the Ministry of Education Evaluation Center each year, but also collects relevant data details and provides data basis for professional construction evaluation and curriculum construction evaluation, supporting automatic scoring of quantifiable indicators. Evaluation system is mainly used for curriculum construction evaluation, professional construction evaluation, and college teaching work evaluation, etc., which provides information technology to carry out self-evaluation. Data monitoring system displays automatically indicators closely related to undergraduate teaching through data dashboards, and implements automatic alarm of key indicators. The system provides the conditions and guarantees for conducting self-evaluation and strengthening the monitoring of teaching quality. It simplifies the workflow, improves the efficiency, and accelerates the construction of information management by using this system, as well as promotes the decision-making scientific and enhances the policy-making effective, which plays an important role in supervising and evaluating the quality of personnel training.

### ***C. The Effect and Evaluation of "Two-Three-Four-Five" Self-evaluation:***

Under the general framework of "Two-Three-Four-Five" self-evaluation system, SWPU has established and perfected self-evaluation system to meet its own needs and formed a joint supervision system of management departments, teachers, and students, which is a framework of two levels. Through various forms of study and discussion, all schools and departments clarified their own responsibility on quality assurance furtherly, and built a consensus quality culture. It not only enhanced the awareness of quality, but also strengthened the personnel training center status. The concepts of "Student Centred", "Outcome-based Education" and "Continuous Quality Improvement" have been strengthened. The university strengthened the improvement work after evaluation, and self-evaluation is operated by PDCA cycle. The professional construction evaluation, curriculum construction evaluation, teachers' teaching quality evaluation, and functional departments quality assurance evaluation have become the norm. The practice has been recognized by other universities. However, it is necessary to further strengthen the guidance on college teaching work evaluation. And the evaluation carried out by schools based on informatization needs to be further explored.

## **V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The government has established "Five-in-One" evaluation system with Chinese characteristics on the top-level design. Based on self-evaluation, the government combines with other kinds of evaluations to form the multi-participatory quality assurance system. Self-evaluation is one of the main contents of internal quality assurance, as well as an important way to improve quality. This paper mainly analyzed the connotation of self-evaluation, combed the main problems existing in current self-evaluation of colleges and universities, and introduced the "Two-Three-Four-Five" self-evaluation of SWPU, and summarized its framework, practice effect and experience, in order to provide reference for other colleges and universities. In the future, to improve the quality of higher education, further research is needed on the technical methods of self-evaluation, how to assess the effectiveness of the project implementation, and how to give full play to the effectiveness of self-evaluation.

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