

# The Fairness and Efficiency of the Higher Education

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**Abstract:** The fairness and efficiency are the two basic value measures in weighing up the innovation and development of the tertiary education. They are relative, developing and fair. The fairness in education is the extension and reflection of the social fairness in the tertiary education, which includes the fairness in education rights and equal chances. The efficiency in education is the application of the efficiency principle in economics, which mainly points to the efficient application and allocation, that is, to obtain the greatest production from a certain investment.

**Keywords:** fairness and efficiency; higher education; innovation and development; value criterion

Fairness and efficiency are the theoretical questions which are being explored ever in philosophy, economics and pedagogy. It is also man's pursue. Fairness and efficiency in pedagogy have been existed all the time as an over-all essential matter all over the world and are the two objectives in developing education. It is the hard decisive choice as well. With the rapid development of the higher education in China, the question has absorbed more attention and has been one important subject in the 21st century.

## 1. Higher education fairness and efficiency

It is believed that fairness and efficiency are hard to satisfy both sides. Before the analysis of the question, we should first learn the definitions and relations between them.

As to the fairness in education, Carlman offers four levels: the same opportunity to go into the education system; the same opportuni-

ty to go into different education channels; the same opportunity in education effect; the same opportunity in influencing life quality. The four levels cover all the processes in education and explain the definition of fairness in education from different stages. The fairness in education is the extension and reflection of the social fairness in the tertiary education, which includes the fairness in education rights and equal chances. The reason why fairness in higher education is the basic measure of value and the basic starting point is that higher education can make progress dramatically in man's social living situation and improve the fairness in society, besides accepting higher education has become the basic human rights of modern society. As a result, the fairness of higher education has been regarded as "the greatest tool" in achieving the fairness in society.

The efficiency in education is the application of the efficiency principle in economics,

which mainly points to the efficient application and allocation, that is, "to obtain the greatest production from a certain investment" [1]. The efficiency principle is the basic principle in resources allocation, which is the same to allocation in education resources. Therefore, education efficiency has naturally come to the basic measure of value in the development and innovation of higher education.

The fairness and efficiency are the contradictory unity in the field of education. As the measure of value, the relativity, development and "justice" of fairness and efficiency not only illustrate the inward unity of the fairness and efficiency in education but also make it difficult to grasp them in practice of the innovation and development in higher education. Therefore, the relationship between the fairness and efficiency is that they are opposite with each other, while unite with each other at the same time.

### 1.1 The conflict between the fairness and efficiency in higher education

The contradiction between the fairness and efficiency is not in the nature but in practice and specificity. It is related to the resources requirement, allocation style and the area differences.

Firstly, conflicts of resource demand. In the contradictions of fairness and efficiency in education, the dispute between the supply and demand of resources is most noticeable. In keeping with the necessity of the development of China's socialism market economy, to increase the opportunity in higher education, i.e. pursuing the fairness in education, is the essential task of the innovation and development of China's higher education. To increase the opportunity has to enlarge the scale of education, to add the number of schools and to promote

the enrolment rate, summarily, the education demand is increasing constantly. Nowadays, there has been forming an intense relationship between supply and demand in the great demand in education and the limited education input resources. Meanwhile, to promote the quality of higher education continuously is another essential task of the innovation and development of higher education. To promote the quality of higher education needs great amount of funds input which results in the inevitable contradiction between the supply and allocation in mass development and quality construction.

Secondly, conflicts of allocation style. The conflict between the fairness and efficiency higher education not only reflects in the allocation of education resources, but also in the allocation style of it. In market economy context, market is the main style in resources allocation. The superior in quality and efficiency has the privilege and selection right in obtaining resources. Efficiency is the reason in market resources allocation. The different roles of government and market in resources allocation usually bring about contradiction and conflict. To allocate education resources by the system of market can improve the efficiency in education and increase the development of the higher education. It can also enlarge the differences of the ability in obtaining the resources among universities of various style, area and level. Thus would result in the situation in which stronger will be more and the poorer will be worse, which causes the new unfairness. The higher education cannot establish a comparative mechanism of survival of the fittest in keeping with the complete marketing economy and also cannot allow the inferior to lose their opportunity to receive higher education be-

cause of their poor economy condition. The government can play a main role in providing fair comparative environment, increasing fair opportunities and lessening discrimination and unfairness. Consequently, market cannot take the place of the role of government in education resources allocation. But to highlight the interference of the government will ruin the rules of free competition, reduce the vitality of competition and lead to the descending of efficiency.

Thirdly, conflicts among area differences. The relationship between the fairness and efficiency in higher education is relative. In different countries and different areas, there are great differences in the numbers of schools, the opportunities of get education, fund input and quality efficiency etc.

#### 1.2 The unity between the fairness and efficiency of higher education

The efficiency of higher education is the base and method of the fairness, while the fairness of higher education is the aim of the efficiency. They are depending on each other, improving mutually and influencing with each other.

Firstly, The efficiency of higher education is the base and method of the fairness. The achievement of the fairness of higher education is based on the increasing of efficiency of production efficiency of higher education and the descending of X efficiency (i.e. the difference between cost and proceeds of the education departments). It is well known that the contradiction between the increasing demand and lack of limit education resources is worse dramatically. It is also the common question faced by most of the developing countries in the world. The existence of the financial crisis in higher education has not only suspend the

enlargement of the higher education size, but also make the schooling conditions of higher education deteriorate until to influence the improvement of higher education. The long existence of the situation will inevitably affects the achievement of the fairness of higher education. If the efficiency of higher education has not been improved with effort, the fulfilling of the fairness of higher education will not be achieved.

Secondly, the fairness of higher education is the aim of the efficiency. The efficiency of higher education is high or low is depending on how the subject to satisfy its demanding. The ultimate objective of the various works by man is to satisfy man's physical and spiritual demands. So do higher education. The aim of increasing the higher education and promote its efficiency of production and resources allocation is also to satisfy man's demanding of it. The fairness of higher education as an essential objective of China's higher education shows directions to the efficiency and standards of higher education. And it also provides standards. Therefore it is regarded as the aim of higher education. Only when you have specific aim can it have real community.

Thirdly, the relationship between the fairness and efficiency of higher education is not always contradictory. The fairness of higher education affects its efficiency. Instead, the efficiency of higher education affects its fairness. In different historical periods, the relationship between the fairness and efficiency of higher education are different. Though there is a contradictory side in them, but they are not opposite forever.

Therefore, the fairness and efficiency is a pair of contradictions. They are opposite with each other, while unite with each other at the

same time. The unity lies in that there will be no efficiency without fairness while there will be no fairness without efficiency. The opposition lies in that efficiency strengthens the right of accepting higher education to selected talents while fairness highlights everyone has the right to accept higher education. In the process of mass higher education, the fairness and efficiency can be mutually taken into account. If higher education cannot meet the demand from both society and individual, it is not efficient. Meanwhile, if there is no efficiency, the fairness can be merely inferior.

## **2. The collaboration of fairness and efficiency in higher education**

The fairness and efficiency are two value aims in the innovation and developing of the higher education. None of them can be neglected. If they are conflicting with each other, a balancing point which is so-called the best area must be found. Keeping the fairness and efficiency balanced is the base to develop higher education and important content in sustained development.

2.1 To strengthen policy-making and establish the reasonable aims of fairness and efficiency

The balance between the fairness and efficiency first lies in the reasonable aims. Only when these aims are made reasonably can work out reasonable policy of higher education to achieve the balance of the fairness and efficiency. The innovation and development of higher education has to not only establish general objectives according to the overall level of the social economy and the development strategy, but also establish specific objectives of them and analyze their reasonability. As a consequence it requires the policy-makers and su-

pervisors have been clearly aware of the fairness and efficiency and make scientific decision resulting from reasonable objective.

2.2 To find the balancing point between the fairness and efficiency

To find the balancing point of the fairness and efficiency is the basic condition to make steady innovation policy. It provides us the fundamental judging criteria in specific construction. The fairness and efficiency are the two basic tendencies in man's values. In the field of higher education, there were two typical theories called utilitarianism and humanism respectively in history. The former concentrated on the efficient and practical functions of higher education to country, society and individual while the latter concentrated that higher education should be human-oriented. Simply, the former highlighted efficiency while the latter fairness. Currently, the theory in higher education tends to believe that utilitarianism and humanism have a certain unity in modern times. They can mutually collaborate under some conditions. It is also proved in practice that it is dangerous to go to extremes in fairness and efficiency. It is better for man to find a practical balanced point in relevant policies. Generally, the future judging tendency for us should be: following closely the continuous steps of society economy; perfecting the higher education system; opening the structure of higher education to achieve the greater fairness with efforts.

2.3 To keep the dynamic balance by bringing the government and market into play rationally

The government and market play different roles in emphasis, style and mechanism of fairness and efficiency. Fairness is a mechanism to keep society stable. The fulfilling of

the education fairness relies on the macro adjustment and control which are mainly from economic, lawful and necessary executive methods. The government can fulfill its fairness objective by limit beforehand and compensate afterwards. Limiting beforehand means to carry out measures before the activity, that is, to limit the innovation and development in a field that cannot do harm to fair objectives. Compensating afterwards means those measures to compensate the harmed fairness in addition to those activities. The efficiency is a social developing mechanism while education efficiency can be fulfilled eventually by the inward driving force of the action subjects (the universities and colleges) and the competition among them. The functions of government merely limits to making the fair market obligations but not to interfere with the competition among universities and colleges. This is the limit of the government. Take an example, to set majors on its own as a right to a university, it belongs to the competition obligations. The government's strict approval procedure in setting majors should be altered to suggestion gradually. Only this way can improve competition and increase the efficiency.

2.4 To achieve the regularly enhancement of the fairness and the efficiency by making more creative rules and regulations

Regulations usually are known as a set of behavior rules in a society one has to obey. Fairness and efficiency are the basic requirements to regulations service. The changes in regulations demanding will result in unbalanced regulations and lead to the creation of them. The Chinese famous economist Yi-fu

Lin provides two fundamental innovative styles: tempting regulations innovation and obligatory regulations innovation. The regulations innovation in education fairness fits the obligatory regulations innovation while that in education efficiency fits the tempting regulations innovation. The tempting regulation innovation takes universities or colleges themselves as subjects in which universities and colleges have the decision-making power are the prerequisite. At the present time, the rapid enlargement of higher education market and the thorough change in the style of allocating the higher education resources have created great chances in increase the decision-making power. The enlargement of market size has forced universities and colleges to compete for the recruitment of new students by promote their own strength. Or it is hard for them to live. The changes in structure of funds and earnings provide universities and colleges more power in decision-making. The change in the enlargement of the market size and resources allocation means a lot to universities and colleges. Its direct outcome is universities and colleges have become real competitive subject and acting subject.

In brief, the relationship between fairness and efficiency is opposite with each other, while unite with each other at the same time. They are two value aims in the innovation and developing of the higher education. None of them can be neglected. To keep balance between fairness and efficiency is the base to keep higher education develop balanced and also the main content of the continuous development of higher education.