Interculturality and Its Didactics

Hungary Higher Education Quality Assurance System

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Abstract: Higher education quality assurance system has drawn much attention since 1980s. Most countries are committed to build the higher education quality assurance system to meet international standards. Under such an international trend, Hungary also actively promotes higher education reform, and established Hungarian Accreditation Committee and in order to ensure the quality of higher education.

Keywords: Hungary higher education; quality assurance; Hungarian accreditation committee

1. Introduction

In 1980s, higher education has entered into the stage of popularization, with the continuous expansion of higher education, more and more attention has been paid on the quality of higher education. Till 1990s, higher education quality assurance system is proposed as a new concept. From then on, almost every country starts to build higher education quality assurance systems. Hungary also follows the international pace actively.

2. Hungary Higher Education

Hungary higher education has a long history. According to historical records, as early as the 13th and 14th century, Hungary has respectively in Buda, Pecs and Brady Pozsony, and other places set up several universities. Generally, the university established in 1367 in Pecs is regarded as basis of higher education in Hungary. Till the 16th and 17th century, when the Ottoman Empire invaded, the higher education of Hungary was interrupted. In the late 18th century, Hungary has established the basic framework of modern university. Now there are 74 colleges and universities in Hungary, including 21 National Universities, 11 national colleges, 8 non-National Universities, 34 non-National colleges[3] Universities are

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[3] List of universities in Hungary. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_Hungary.

given priority to academic research-oriented talents, courses in the academic are stronger, and colleges are given priority to train applied talents, courses are paid more attention to the cultivation of students' practical ability.

Since 1980s, Hungary gradually has expanded the scale of the higher education; there are 19.8 million people in school, but with the development of economy, Hungarian population declines, and the phenomenon of an aging population growing. According to statistics of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China: in 2006, the population of Hungary are 10.08 million people, in 2008 fell to 9.98 million, by the end of 2012 in January, the Hungarian population has been reduced to 9.96 million people. As the following chart:
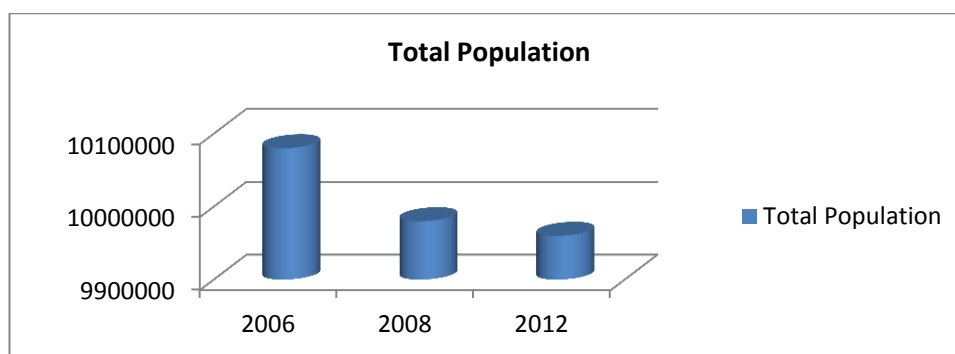

Chart 1. Total Population

The number of total population decline leads to decreasing in the number of students in higher education. 2004-2005, the Hungarian students' enrollment in colleges and universities for 421520 people, 2005-2006 year, fell to 400000 people, and 2009-2010, the number of the students in Colleges and universities are only 242701 people, compared with 2004-2005 year decreased by 42.4%. As the following chart:
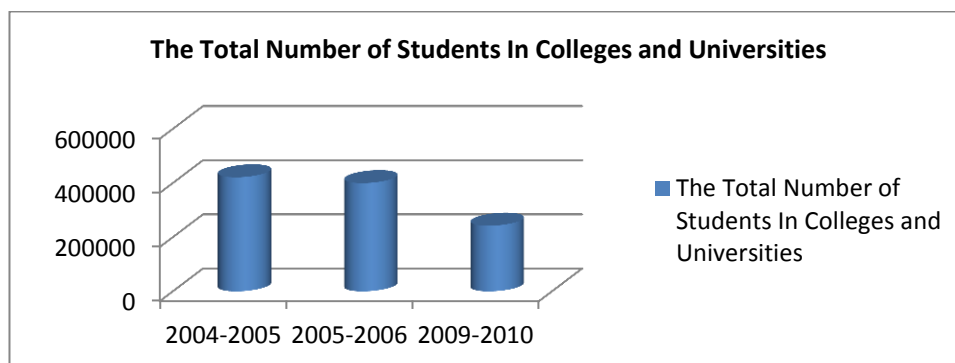

Chart 2. The Total Number of Students in Colleges and Universities

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Facing such situation, on the one hand, Hungary actively increases its financial input to the higher education to ensure Enrollment Rates of higher education, but with the whole capitalist countries economic recession, the financial investment on higher education is difficult to continue. From 2012 September began to implement the scholarship system to replace the previous free university system[1]; on the other hand, take various policies to attract European and world outstanding students to Hungary. Such as actively participating in the Bologna process, achieving the degree and credit mutual recognition with European countries, so as to promote the free flow of students.

According to Higher Education Act of Hungary issued in 1993, top management organization of higher education is Ministry of Education, and Administration of the Secretariat is consisted. Administrative departments of higher education are one of six institutions; Administrative Secretariat consists of four administrative institutions of higher education. There are Higher Educational Secretariat, Department of Higher Education, Department of Higher Educational Applications and Programmes, Department of Higher Educational Development and Evaluation.[2] Four institutions operate in parallel and within its legal range, to ensure Hungarian higher education smooth operation. At the same time, Higher Education Act of 1993 also approved to establish two key agencies to control and development of higher education in Hungary: Hungarian Accreditation Committee, referred to as HAC and Higher Education and Scientific Council. The Hungarian Accreditation Commission (HAC) has played an important role in the institutional accreditation and quality assurance of higher education.

3. Hungarian Accreditation Committee

A) HAC Summary

Hungarian Accreditation Commission has established in 1992 and for examination and approval the Ph.D. On September 1, 1993 Higher Education Act formally implemented, HAC obtained the legal status of the accreditation institutions of higher education. Its functions are defined as: continuous monitoring of higher education teaching and research activities, and constantly improves the assessment system. Universities can establish its quality development plan in their purview, HAC supports various universities exercise their functions and power, and by regular assessment to provide suggestions for them (assessment at least once every eight years, can also be carried out according to the Ministry of education instruction not regular). At the same time, HAC provides the expert reports so as to

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[1] *Higher education reform of Hungary*. http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012-12/13/c_124086986.html.
[2] (2002). *Higher Education in Hungary Heading for the Third Millennium*. Ministry of Education of the Republic of Hungary, 266.

help the government guidance of higher education, such as provides suggestions for the government in making decisions about the quality of higher education, higher education policy and the new revision of the draft law, etc.

So we can see that the overall goal of HAC is to maintain the quality of higher education, and to provide the guarantee for the development of higher education quality. The organization chart is as follows:[1]
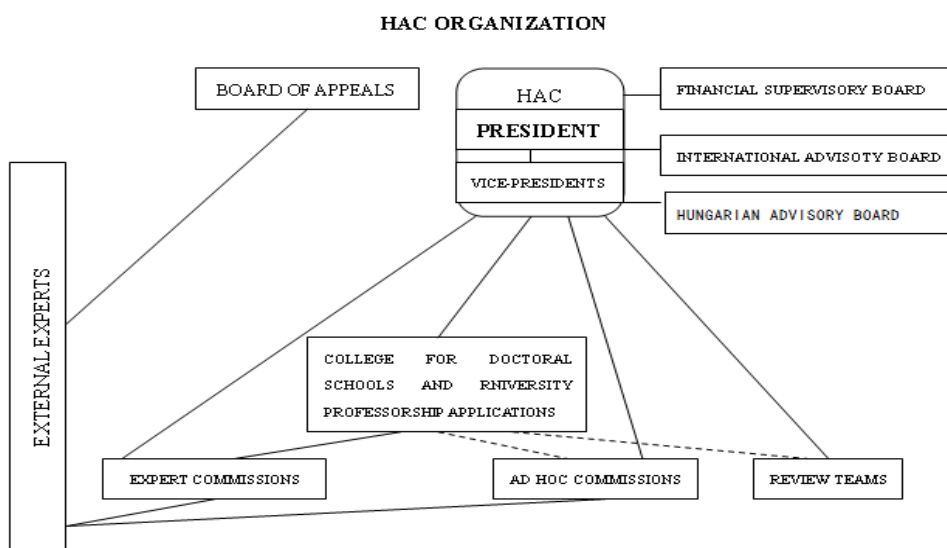
HAC ORGANIZATION

| BOARD OF APPEALS | HAC **PRESIDENT** | FINANCIAL SUPERVISORY BOARD |

EXTERNAL EXPERTS

VICE-PRESIDENTS

INTERNATIONAL ADVISOTY BOARD

HUNGARIAN ADVISORY BOARD

COLLEGE FOR DOCTORAL SCHOOLS AND RNIVERSITY PROFESSORSHIP APPLICATIONS

EXPERT COMMISSIONS   AD HOC COMMISSIONS   REVIEW TEAMS

Chart 3

According to the organization chart we can see, HAC carry out effective coordination in all evaluation activities with Financial Supervisory Board, International Advisory Board and Hungarian Advisory Board. While External Experts is independent from HAC and directly responsible for Board of Appeals and Committee of Experts. This structure laid the foundation for HAC to make the right decision, if universities and colleges not satisfied with the assessment results can appeal by Board of Appeals, and HAC must respond for them. Obviously, HAC is independent of the government and acting independently, but is still supervised by some departments, so it must be responsible for its evaluation mechanism and making resolutions. This has decided, HAC must strictly abide by the assessment procedures in the assessing and making assessment report of evaluation, at the same time with respect to the rating agencies.

B) The Quality Assessment of HAC

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[1] *HAC.*
http://www.mab.hu/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=230&Itemid=643&lang=en.

HAC as the higher education accreditation and assessment of Hungarian official institution, its characteristics are independent and exclusive. Along with the revision of Higher Education Act, its function is changing, but the supervision, evaluation and promotion for the quality of higher education has been one of its core functions. HAC uphold the independence, objectivity, impartiality, transparency, professionalism and responsibility principle, when in the decision-making need to pass through the three levels, On the top level is the plenary session or Plenum; on the medium level are the colleges and the institutional and interdisciplinary committees; and on the lowest level are the expert committees for programmed accreditation, the special and ad hoc committees and the (ad hoc) visiting committees. Hierarchical decision-making procedures laid the foundation for HAC to make the right decision.

When HAC is making quality assessment and certification of colleges and universities, it strictly follows certain procedures. First of all, a self-evaluation within the colleges and universities, and a self-assessment report submitted at the same time; and then HAC appointed a site visit by peer reviewers and it was also required to submit an evaluation report; on this basis HAC made a decision, and adopted a position for the institution; Finally Minister of Education made a final decision. Obviously the quality assessment of HAC is paying more and more attention to participation of colleges and universities as subjects of evaluation. At the same time, HAC also made it clear to add the participation of college students in the process of evaluation. Colleges and universities, students, peers, all these evaluation subjects participation will make the evaluation results more reasonable and fairer.

Taking a university as an example, HAC would send Accreditation Announcement to the higher education institution before the assessment. The higher education institution will respond to this announcement and the university will be ready to carry out self-evaluation. At the same time, HAC will appoint Visiting Committee to visit the higher education institution, after HAC staff officer examination the self-assessment report of the higher education institution. Generally Visiting Committee will select 3-7 experts, sometimes also increase the number of experts according to the number of evaluation projects. At the same time, the team has the right to require replacement team members for HAC. In order to supervise the assessment team, HAC will send a member working as a secretary. In general, the whole evaluation process will last for three days. Through the investigation and the meeting during the visit to write the evaluation report, then Expert Committee for Institutional Accreditation will prepare the report and submit it to Conference Committee, and the higher education institution will respond to the evaluation results, if dissatisfied with the evaluation results that the higher education institution can appeal to Conference Committee. The last, HAC will pass the assessment report at the plenary meeting. With the higher education institution's

permission, HAC will submit the assessment report to Ministry of Education and publish it.

From the point of view of the whole evaluation process, all higher education institutions are mutual coordination to obtain real results, and the college as evaluation subject has great autonomy, they can put forward opinion at any time on the evaluation result. At the same time, in order to guarantee the scientific of self-assessment, HAC will have the unified evaluation guide of the self-assessment to guide the higher education institution.

For final evaluation results, if the evaluation of college or university doesn't comply with the legal and quality requirements, HAC will make following decisions: First, it will suspend its graduation examination and the right to grant degrees; If a major or course cannot be reached the standard, HAC will be forced to stop the major or course; If college or university is still unable to meet the standards after reforming, HAC will terminate authenticating for the college or university. And for those students who are studying in the college or university, HAC will provide education in the similar college or university for them according to Higher Education Act.

At the same time, HAC also clearly stipulates: all institutions of higher education must pass the certification process before June 30, 2000. From the beginning of June 30, 2002, if the university or college did not meet the legal and quality requirements, it will not be allowed to operate. So presently, universities and colleges of Hungary are accredited by HAC, and operated according to Higher Education ACT.

C) Bologna Process and HAC Reform

With the advancement of "Bologna Process", it has become one of the key point of European educational reforms to establish the "higher education quality secure system". As the independent and unique official organization of institutional accreditation and quality assessment in Hungary, HAC not only devotes itself to establish the assessment system which is consistent with its national circumstances, but also broaden its horizon, contacting and cooperating with other European Institutions of higher education quality evaluation so as to improve its own accreditations and evaluation system. In view of this, HAC actively joined some international institutions of higher education quality assurance organization and became the member of ENQA, INQAAHE and so on. "At present, the new college certification guidelines adopted by Hungary are basically revised according to the European Standards and Guidelines which is made by ENQA." (Deqi, 2009, p. 69)

So under the "Bologna Process", HAC endeavors to improve its own evaluation system as well as be geared to international standards in order to enhance the level of its quality evaluation.

4. The Features of Hungarian Higher Education Quality Assurance System

As the official organization of institutional accreditation and quality assessment which is independent from government and colleges, there are obvious characteristics in the process of operation.

A) Independence

Differ from the state control of higher education evaluation in our country, HAC, in its early days, was endowed with the independent legal status. Although Higher Education Act changed several times, the position of HAC has not changed. HAC, called the Hungarian certification Committee, it seems that its main function is institutional accreditation rather than quality assessment. In fact, the process of institutional accreditation is the process of quality assessment. The true meaning of the college and university certification is: "In higher education, through the inspection, evaluation or both at the same time, colleges and universities or the major are approved. This shows that the college and university reached a minimum acceptable quality control and quality assurance process". (Burton & Neave, 1992) The college and university certification held every eight years essentially is evaluating all colleges and universities of Hungary, so as to ensure the healthy development of higher education.

B) Professionalism

As the official institution of higher education evaluation of Hungary, the professionalism undoubtedly is one of its basic characteristics. All members of HAC are experts with high academic status in their respective fields, and HAC will give priority to the experts who have experience of assessment. At the same time, it is worth stressing that HAC puts forward to improve its professionalism explicitly in its Self-Assessment Report. Especially the sensibility to the reform of higher education quality assurance in the international, to absorb practical experience both at home and abroad constantly and to make adjustments according to its own situation continuously.

C) Transparency

According to the organization chart and the evaluation process, it is not hard to see that the participation of pluralistic evaluation subject is emphasized when the certification and quality assessment is conducted. At the same time the whole evaluation process interlocks, mutual supervises, and the evaluation results should be published. These measures won praises for HAC with its transparency in the case of ensuring the objective and fair assessment results.

D) Openness

In December 1992, on the first meeting of HAC, they decided to set up International Advisory Committee. There are nine experts in the committee and they are all outstanding scholars that come from European Union and United States academia. They effectively collaborate with HAC. Hold a meeting every year to discuss the annual report of HAC. At the same time they also propose for every aspect of HAC. In 2008/09, in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines, HAC was evaluated by an external experts' team. HAC became the member of ENQA (European Quality Assurance Association) once again, elected for a term of five years.

Therefore, HAC always try to keep in touch with the international, devote to absorb good experience to reform itself. To ensure the operation of processes and standards in line with international practice, finally let its higher education evaluation system reach the world.

E) Accountability

According to Higher Education Act of Hungary, the main function of HAC is continuously monitoring higher education teaching and research activities and perfecting the evaluation system. Therefore, within the scope of the law, HAC effectively exercises its functions and powers. And HAC cannot be controlled by any authorities. It operates independently and be responsible for improving the quality of higher education of Hungary. At the same time, HAC also be responsible for the college and university who are evaluated. From start assessment to make the evaluation report, HAC insists a principle that is render services for university, through try the best to mobilize the enthusiasm of colleges and universities to participate in the assessment, to make the college and university is aware of its advantages and disadvantages clearly. So the final purpose of the accreditation and evaluation of HAC is to promote the benign development of colleges and universities.

Of course, features of HAC are not limited to these. It also has the objectivity, the collaboration with universities, and the uniformity with the interests of the stakeholders and so on. According to its values and features, we can easily infer the development trend of HAC in the future.

5. The Future Development Trend of HAC

A) Evaluation Subject is More Diversified

At the beginning, HAC want to achieve diversification of evaluation subjects, and this is one of its main goals. Formal members of HAC from higher education institutions, research institutions and professional organizations, also invite some

other areas not eligible to vote and a student membership without eligible to vote, from the point of its personnel organization, a wide range and various types. During the process of assessing HAC focus on College self assessment, invite external evaluation expert group involved at the same time. The diversification of evaluation subject is bound to make assessment results fairer.

Assessment subjects of HAC for students' proportion is so little, with the development of international higher education evaluation, demanding to increase the students as the main assessment participation has become a mainstream trend. HAC want to be in line with international standards and putting students into the subject of evaluation is bound to. So the evaluation subject will be further diversification.

B) Evaluation Standards Diversification

HAC provides An Accreditation Guidebook and A List of Performance Indicate for the self-assessment of colleges and universities, at the same time they also using in the peer review, the guide contains all elements of the evaluation, including the development target, policy, curriculum structure, the number of the students in degree and graduation rates, students' study or practice, academic evaluation methods, qualification of staff, number of employees, facilities, internal quality assessment and scientific research etc.. The guideline provides guidance for each college may inevitably lead to all the criteria for the assessment of colleges and universities are the same; every university has its own development characteristics. So when we evaluating should pay attention to using diversification of assessment criteria. It should be according to different colleges using different evaluation criteria, considering the doctoral, master's and bachelor's training are different, as well as short-term occupation training, distance and lifelong education patterns also has their owe characteristics.

C) Evaluation mode of internationalization

It pinpointed in the HAC's aims related to the quality of its operation that operating within the framework of international practice prevalent in the profession of the higher education quality assurance, and in line with European Standards and expectations.

HAC is committed to achieving its evaluation model is in line with international standards and in consistent with European countries, on the one hand,to keep the advanced assessment of HAC, on the other hand, the uniform standards can make Hungarian universities to compare with foreign universities. And finally realize the optimization of development. Therefore, to promote the internationalization of evaluation mode has been one of the key for Hungarian higher education quality evaluations.

D) Self-assessment Institutionalized

International Advisory Board of HAC got through the self-assessment plan when in May 1998 meeting. "Any system of quality assurance should periodically seek to be evaluated and should keep in touch with developments in other countries. The Board therefore proposes an external evaluation of the system and procedures of HAC that would involve an international team using the experience of experts in similar bodies also from other countries." So in 2002, issued its self-assessment report, content can be roughly divided into the description and analysis. The part of description mainly introduces the history, function, organization and operation mode of HAC. And the part of analysis mainly introduces the advantages and disadvantages of HAC on the basis of description and constructing the development trend and frame of HAC.

Now the re-evaluation is carried out on the quality evaluation mechanism to ensure its healthy development of higher education quality assurance system is a hotspot and aporia, with HAC self-assessment report issued, how to better make self-assessment, how to construct a scientific evaluation criteria, and how to improve the evaluation system according to the evaluation results is one of the major problems of HAC facing.

6. Conclusion

Of course, HAC still has a lot of problems in the operation of the process, but it is always adhere to the principle of independence, professional, transparent, open, and responsible are worthy of our reference. Now China is also in like a raging fire for the construction of the quality assurance system of higher education, then adopting the practice of some countries is a shortcut.

By the observation our country's higher education quality assurance system, it is not hard to find that the government has played a dominant role in quality assurance. We can say: "the government is held, and the manager, and the evaluation of the higher education." This single management system is not only difficult to guarantee the fairness and science of evaluation, but also is not conducive to the mobilization of all sectors of society to participate in the construction of quality assurance of higher education.

In addition, the quality assurance system of higher education in China still exist many questions, such as the strong administrative color, the assessment index and the single assessment subject. Construction of higher education quality assurance system is a popular trend in the world. As a big country of higher education, we should keep pace with the times and strive for construction scientific quality assurance system of higher education. The construction of higher education quality assurance system in Hungary and China started almost at the same time, but by

comparison, Hungary has obvious superiority in terms of diversified subjects of Assessment and in construction of the internal quality assurance system. These are worthy of understanding and learning.

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