How to Improve the Chinese First-Generation College Students’ Learning Outcomes--
Current situation, influencing factors and intervention strategies

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Abstract

The education of first-generation college students (FGCS) is an issue of education equality, which colleges in many countries attach great importance to. Some Chinese academic advisors have tried to do research and practice in this field. Based on the data of 4471 students in Tsinghua University of China, this study explores learning outcome of FGCS and its effect factors. The findings show that (1) FGCS' time devotion to learning is significantly more than other students, but their grades, knowledge acquisition, and ability gains are worse; (2) their learning outcome is significantly correlated with nine factors including inner learning motivation, extra-curricular activities, etc. This study also carried out a contrast experiment to show that the designed strategies can help FGCS improve their learning outcomes. Some recommendation for academic advisors are displayed.

Keywords

First-Generation College Students, Learning Outcome, Effect Factors, Academic Advising Strategy

Proposal

Context and Motivation

The education of first-generation college students (FGCS) is an issue of education equality, which colleges in many countries attach great importance to. First-generation college students refer to those whose both parents have never had access to higher education. Whether they could achieve academic success is a critical indicator of education equality.

Chinese government has put great value on FGCS. Policies have been made to promote equal opportunities for higher education, and colleges have also enacted
supporting measures for FGCS. However, so far most attention has been paid to achieving equal admission opportunities and financial aids, and less concern is placed on their learning outcomes. This research focus on Chinese FGCS’ learning outcome, exploring its status, effect factors and potential academic advising strategies.

George D. Ku (2009) has showed that the success of a student lies in his own efforts and the interaction between school education and environment. Nowadays, with the rapid development of higher education and social mobility, more and more FGCS have come into our top universities. Taking Tsinghua University as an example, from 2012-2015, the average proportion of the first-generation college students among all the college freshmen is 29.74%. However, research indicates that first-generation college students usually meet with more difficulties in the course of study than non-first generation students (Hudley, 2014). For academic advisors, how to help them adapt to this new environment and keep up with their learning progress is a very difficult but important task.

Based on the data of 4471 students in Tsinghua University, this study explores learning outcome of first-generation college students and its effect factors. The findings show that (1) FGCS’ time devotion to learning is significantly more than other students, but their grades, knowledge acquisition, and ability gains are worse; (2) their learning outcome is significantly correlated with nine factors including inner learning motivation, sense of self-respect, extra-curricular activities, etc. This study also carried out a contrast experiment of 146 freshmen of the same major, among whom 72 students are FGCS. Specially designed academic advising strategies were applied to the 72 students, and their average grades after a semester were significantly better than the control group.

Three main questions will be answered in this study:

1) What is the current status of Chinese FGCS’ learning outcome? 
2) What factors will affect Chinese FGCS’ learning outcome? 
3) How to help Chinese FGCS improve their learning outcomes for academic advisors?
An outline of the presentation is as follows:

1) Description of this study’s main findings:
   ✓ The current status of Chinese FGCS’ learning outcomes
   ✓ The main effect factors of Chinese FGCS’ learning outcomes
   ✓ The intervention effects of the applied academic advising strategies

2) How to promote Chinese FGCS’ learning outcomes: with cases from Tsinghua University.
   ✓ Class construction
   ✓ Tutors (senior students from the same major)
   ✓ Q&A meeting, small-class teaching
   ✓ One-to-one academic advising

3) Questions and discussion on Chinese FGCS’ learning outcomes.

**Presenter**

The presentation will be given by the following four presenters:

Lead Presenter holds a PhD of Control Theory and Engineering from Tsinghua University. She is director of the Center for Student Learning and Development of Tsinghua University, who has 16 years’ experience in academic advising and advising administration, with a certification of Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF), Nation Psychological Counselor (NPC), Board Certified Coach (BCC) and Myer-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

Co-Presenters are student advisors of the Center for Student Learning and Development of Tsinghua University. The duty of the presenter is to help students who have difficulties in learning improve their academic performance. Based on their work with first-generation college students with low learning outcomes, they have accumulated rich experience and prepared to share with attendees.