

The Sustainable Quality Management in China's Private Higher Education: Developments and Challenges from ZY University

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Abstract: *Quality management is one of the major concerns for the success and development of higher education. This is especially true for China's private colleges and universities who are still on their way for the prosperity and progress. With the introduction of "sustainability" in education and management scholarship, the concept of sustainable quality management has been deeply integrated with the study and the practice of China's higher education. By taking the sustainable quality management in ZY University as a case in study, this paper aims to have a detailed analysis and a systematical summary on its specific actions in theoretical exploration and practical development in sustainable quality management. With a focus on its established internal and external mechanisms in terms of quality evaluating, quality monitoring, and information responding, this paper also aims to include a list of quality management issues and challenges that commonly shared by other Chinese private colleges or universities.*

Keywords: *Sustainable Quality Management, China's Higher Education, Sustainability, Developments and Challenges, Private University*

1. Introduction

With the release and revision of the PRC's law on the Promotion of Private Education, the expansion of China's private education, especially China's private higher education, has been a major breakthrough and achievement in its reform and development. Only in the year of 2021, for example, there are totally 773 private colleges and universities operating in China, accounting for a quarter of its existing higher institutions.

The born and booming of private colleges and universities has been featured as one of China's higher education advancements. In comparison to its size and scale that have been well recognized, however, the quality of private education management and its sustainability still remains disputable. What progress they have made in terms of quality control or sustainable management? What problems and challenges they are facing now? These questions need to be carefully explored and then satisfactorily answered via continuous analyses on the theoretical achievements private universities may have and the practical issues that private institutions may face in their quality management.

Therefore, in this paper, it is going to take ZY University- a fast developing private university- as a case for study and to provide a general overview on its explorations as well as practices in education quality management. ZY University is a full-time private institution founded in 1981 and accredited in 2008 by the PRC's Ministry of Education (MOE) as a four-year university running up to 51 bachelor degree programmes. With over 40-year's history of development, ZY University now comes to its era of prosperity in higher learning, enjoying opportunities for new development but having challenges in some respects as well.

2. Literature review

Quality is known as the lifeline of Education. This is especially true for the research and practice of sustainable quality management and quality assurance system which seem to be even more important in higher education, when expected to cultivate high-level standards of specialized talents. Most recently, scholars from all over countries have conducted different surveys and discussions on those topics as sustainability of higher education and sustainable education quality management.

2.1 Higher Education and Sustainable Quality Management

Sustainability, a new field of education and management studies, is always one of the super concerns for research on organization and its internal and external management. It is generally believed to be developed from scholarship on environmental problems and other related issues and arouses many attentions from both the public and professionals right from its very beginning. Typically, from 2015 and on, when the United Nations has announced its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ‘sustainable development’ has become a hot topic in the management of many organizations (Ozsen *et al.*, 2022). As a humanity- and talent-oriented organization, higher education institutions have immediately followed up with the fashion of quality management and fully accepted the philosophy of “sustainability”. Subsequently, scholars have paid continuous efforts in carrying out surveys and experiments in sustainable management and quality explorations.

According to Ozsen *et al.* (2022), sustainable quality management, to some extent, is to manage relevant departments and individuals effectively both inside and outside the organization, which means that all procedures of management and all activities in organization in terms of economy, community, environment, and value creation may be involved or included. Although the quality of higher education can be widely understood as the degree to which educational activities provided by higher education institutions align students’ learning achievements with educational objectives, there are still different ideas and focuses on how to define quality, especially education quality (Niu & Wu, 2021). Therefore, many researchers have begun to explore the practice of sustainable education and quality management from different perspectives, such as the development of teaching plans, the use of online education systems, the impact of campus life, and the satisfaction of teachers, students, and employers with educational practices (Ozsen *et al.*, 2022), which have provided us diversity of ideas on sustainable education and quality management.

In higher education, considering the richness and diversity of internal and external activities, achieving sustainable quality management is an important and complex aspect of Total Quality Management, TQM (Leiber, 2018). As a human resource intensive organization, high education institutions as colleges and universities must take into account the demands of different stakeholders like teachers, students and employers and to assess whether the quality of their activities and services is showing an upward or downward trend (Flores-Marina, 2011). Therefore, deans, director and managers in higher education institutions should take into account internal groups, i.e., students, faculty member, administrative and supporting staff, etc.; and external actors, i.e., government agencies, business enterprises, other academic institutions and partners, etc., in order to design sustainable quality management systems in higher education organizations. Apparently, in order to successfully practice good quality management and to achieve sustainable development capabilities, higher education organizations as colleges and universities need to make a comprehensive reform and to do some innovations in teaching, studying, and organizational management.

2.2 Higher Education and Total Quality Management

Normally, the quality of university education is just like that of commodities in social life and economic markets. We tend to adopt a similar approach to the quality in higher education than that in the business world at our first sight of ‘quality’. According to Segers and Dochy (1996), in fact, research on education quality management and the practice of education quality assurance systems mainly stem from the development of business and the philosophy of TQM in economics and management studies. The concept of total quality management generally emphasizes the sustainable quality management of education quality throughout the whole process of schooling, focusing on the performance of all staff, and dynamically based on a set of established workflow and quality standards (Liu & Ma, 2021).

Qin (2020) also argues that TQM is generally characterized as “three features”, that is, the quality management in terms of the whole process, all staff members, and the entire organization. Du (2021) further points out that the quality of higher education is featured with five major characteristics: subjectivity, developmentality, practicality, integrity, and contextuality. Starting from focus on students’ satisfaction and course recognition, today’s TQM has developed into a more complexed discipline that encompasses leadership and decision-making, strategic adaptation and development, human resource planning, evolving organizational culture, and good infrastructure investment (Manatos *et al.*, 2017).

The TQM methods require an incorporation of various management tools such as teaching plans, course plans, teacher-student participations, self-assessments, and the external evaluation into the college management practice. With the development of scholarship in business and management, some scholars

also come to realize the potential side effects of mass industrialization and over-commercialization upon the advancement of higher education. They find and criticize some negative impacts that the extreme business value culture and quality control practice may have upon the advancement of educational quality system. In China, the so-called marketization or even industrialization of high education is heavily criticized by some scholars since the business concepts of total quality management seem to be not always fully in line with the purpose and pursuit of higher education. It is undeniable, however, that most of the philosophy of planning, organization, and management proposed by TQM still works. It has applications in many areas and inspires us more ideas about quality management and control in higher education.

One of the notable principles that we can learn from TQM is the incorporation of “quality” and “sustainability”. According to Ozsen *et al.* (2022), TQM has successfully introduced the idea of “sustainability” into the scope of quality management in education studies and incorporated them together into the theoretical and practical explorations of today’s education. Just as Niu and Wu (2021) have indicated, with the evolution of business quality culture and its inspirations to the research of education quality system, higher education quality management is going through a new stage from previous focus on passive control under internal and external evaluations to active management in cultivating internal quality culture, which brings us new ideas of the construction and development of higher education quality[1-4].

2.3 Private universities and sustainable education quality management

It is worth noting that after the official promulgation of “the Law on the Promotion of Private Education” in 2002, the Chinese Ministry of Education has proposed in 2010 its new policy of “Separation Management from Running and Evaluation” as the guidance of national quality governance, and subsequently emphasized the practical application of the fourth generation evaluation theory in the construction of higher education evaluation system, transforming China’s higher education from a state-owned enterprise monopolized by the government to a social public enterprise with full social participation (Liu, 2021). Therefore, the startup and development of private college and universities have ushered a golden age.

Nowadays, the quality of higher education is no longer solely regulated and evaluated by the government, and the sustainable quality management of private universities is also an indispensable and important part of higher education development. But, when compared to the rapid development of private education in China in aspects of scale, speed, and impact, there is still relatively vast room for research on the sustainable quality management of China’s private higher education. Studies on sustainable quality management need to be further broadened in terms of private colleges and universities. Based on the operation practice in some of China’s private universities, Dai and Ben (2008) have realistically pointed out a few problems commonly shared by private higher education institutions, such as uneven teacher levels, aging faculty members, excessive part-time teachers, limited enrollment levels, insufficient funding, and inadequate legal status and rights protection. They have called for the establishment of a reasonable, fair A transparent and universally recognized quality evaluation system for private higher education. Wang and Shi (2012) have also elaborated in details on the key factors that affect the sustainable education quality management of private universities from four aspects: teachers, students, curriculum system, and teaching process, as well as the innovative measures that should be taken in the sustainable quality management process of private universities.

Most of the existing literature studies, however, have not paid a full attention to the practice of sustainability in quality management of private higher education institutions, especially those with significant impact. There are, so far, not enough detailed analysis on the challenges of private education quality management nor a thorough summary on the achievements of private institutions’ quality explorations, not even from a micro perspective based on the empirical data. Therefore, the shortage of surveys in private universities’ innovations and difficulties leads somehow to misunderstandings about the development of China’s private education, the gap of which if filled will definitely contribute a lot to the advancement of our higher education. From all above, this paper has attempted to make some efforts in the study of sustainability and quality management of China’s private higher institutions, taking the sustainable education quality management practice of ZY University as an example, to provide a summary of its practice in quality management[5-9].

3. Findings: Exploration and Development of Sustainable and Education Quality Management in Private Universities

Due to today's booming development of private education, the research on sustainable education and quality management has provided us a solid foundation for the exploration and development of the management system and mechanism of private higher education, including theoretical and empirical studies on the concepts and methods in sustainability, quality, and some other related areas with their focus on certain practical issues in education and management. ZY University, for example, has adhered to its mission to "nurture international talents and citizen" and followed the principle of "top quality", striving to achieve its goal of being "a time-honored private institution". By carrying out the so-called strategies of "Management under Standards", "Development with Talents", "Enforcement in Research", and "Establishment by Features", ZY University has actively explored the methods and models of sustainable quality management in private higher education, and achieved significant advancement and achievements.

3.1 SET and TES: a Complete Feedback Mechanism for Teaching & Learning Quality Evaluation

Table 1: Evaluation Indicators for Teachers' Evaluation on Studying in ZY University

Items	Indicators for Evaluation	Sores of Assessment					
		Full Score	E.	G.	M.	A.	B.
Attitudes in Learning	show a positive attitude towards learning, respect teachers, and keep in unity and harmony	10					
	be active in learning, discuss frequently with teachers on issues of learning	5					
	be able to complete course assignments, experimental reports, practical reports, and many others on time, independently and conscientiously, having no attempt or not any signs of plagiarism	5					
	be able to preview before class, review after class, and actively read reference books related to the course	5					
Performance in Class	have a good sense of cooperation in classroom teaching, be active with teachers in interactive activities and help to create a lively atmosphere	10					
	be able to make notes when in class and to complete the assignments according to the teacher's requirements, listen attentively and be totally focused on the teaching and learning materials with no attempts to do any other subjects	10					
	have no signs of behaviors that seem to be unrelated to teaching or even most probably to disturb the course of teaching, such as playing with mobile phones, dozing off, eating in class, listening to headphones, speaking casually, playing games or making phone calls, etc.	10					
	speak and behave in a good manner in class, and also dressed neatly and appropriately in campus.	5					
Discipline	be highly self-disciplined and have a good performance in campus, follow the rules of attendance and the guidance of asking for leaves, and have no records of late arrival, early leave, unreasonable absenteeism, or arbitrary in and out of lecture room.	10					
	have a high rate of attendance in classroom teaching and learning, do not ask for a leave for either private or public reasons	10					
Learning Effects	be qualified in learning and have a good understanding about the basic knowledge in target discipline and show a good ability in the course studies, be well scored in academic tests and exams, capable of doing the assignments and assessments in real practice	10					
	show a good quality in humanity and psychology	10					
Note, Remark & Comment							

E.: excellent, 90% of the full score.

G.: good, 80% of the full score.

M.: moderate: 70% of the full score.

A.: average: 60% of the full score.

B.: bad, 0-50% of the full score.

In order to effectively collect the teachers' and students' feedback and their evaluation information on learning and teaching, to promptly identify potential problems in quality management and to solve problems right from the very beginning, and effectively improve the quality and management efficiency of school education and teaching, ZY University, has first designed and later developed worksheets for "Students' Evaluation on Teaching" (SET) and "Teachers' Evaluation on Studying" (TES).

ZY University has reedited its own indicators and rules for quality review and formed its own version of SET and TES, based on which it has formed a complete feedback mechanism for education quality evaluation. By revising indicators and identifying factors that deeply involved in its quality control, ZY University has found a way to set a new version of principles applicable to its unique contexts and conditions.

Firstly, “Students’ Evaluation on Teaching” (SET) is an important means for students to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of teachers’ teaching in class. ZY University fully utilizes students’ evaluation as a measure to refine evaluation indicators from the perspective of students. It focuses on combining the actual situation of students and their academic programmes, organizing, analyzing, providing feedback and improving work according to the characteristics and needs of students from different schools, disciplines and programmes, to ensure the results of student evaluation of teaching to find their opinions, suggestions, and also demands. Indicators for quality assessment can be timely applied to the design and practice of sustainable education quality management in the university, to improve and to enhance its daily performance in higher education and its innovation in sustainable quality management, forming a positive cycle of evaluation and education[10-13].

Secondly, “Teachers’ Evaluation on Studying” (TES) is launched for sake of identifying some specific indicators or factors as students’ attitudes in learning, their performance and behavior in class, their practice in self-discipline, and their effectiveness of learning, etc. Specific indicators of evaluation, which are expect to help find some main advantages and disadvantages of the quality of teaching and learning in this institution, can be found in Table 1. From this table, we can find that ZY University has used TES as an important component of teaching and learning quality monitoring and guarantee system. Particularly, based on SET and TES, ZY University has also built an important basis for evaluating the state of academic atmosphere in campus. Through the conduct of TES, for example, teachers, faculties, managers, directors, deans and presidents can get their first-hand information on students’ learning and the effectiveness of course teaching, which will play a positive role in improving the teaching and learning quality and sustainability, mobilizing students’ enthusiasm for learning, and continuously improving their effectiveness in management.

3.2 ESS: a Multi-level At-campus Experts’ Inspectorship System for Management Quality Assurance

ZY University has also hired 37 scholars and experts in education and management disciplines from both inside and outside of the campus. Those experienced professors, researchers and senior teachers are invited to work as full-time professionals, to be part of the “Experts’ Supervision System” (ESS). They join the team of supervisors, directors and inspectors to form different levels of supervision committees, including the general supervision committee of the university, its branch in every school and department; all of which are expected to be responsible for regular teaching quality inspection and education management supervision from different levels.

The supervision group, as an important permanent organization for sustainable education quality management at ZY University, has its own specialized system in funding, recruitment, promotion, policy making, decision making and venue guarantee. The supervision group is highly independent in human resources, financial support, and material supply. They are working under the dean or president, top leaders who are responsible for education quality management. For all supervision committees, either the general one who are responsible for the inspection of quality management in the whole campus or its branch supervisory teams working at the school or department levels, their duties have covered almost all sustainable quality issues in 14 faculties and schools, including 6 disciplinary categories such as literature, economics, management, art, engineering, and education, as well as 43 bachelor programmes. And many facts have shown that in the real practice, they are helpful for the achievement of cross departmental and interdisciplinary supervision; the benefit of which can to some extent compensate for the lack of third-party quality evaluation and supervision in private institutions.

The supervision teams will take their roles and carry out regular quality inspections at some key time points: at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the semester. ESS also takes its function in daily management period and on some routine educational issues, such as the revision of Curriculum, updates of Syllabus, the review of teaching plan, the edition of course books, the survey in experiment, and the organization of test and examinations, etc. More specifically, most of the ESS members will also undertake a lot of duties in research and consulting of sustainable quality education and particularly, quality evaluation. They will take their roles in faculty recruitment and assessment, teachers’ cultivation, and the academic development of certain schools and departments. The establishment of ESS, a two-level supervision system at the institutional and faculty level, is just like a bridge, connecting from top

management to bottom. Through monthly supervision meetings, the quality management team can quickly learn about the existing quality issues and make a scientific decision based on abundant information provided by experts' supervision groups. Thus, ZY University has made many adaptations and innovations in education quality management on the basis of the problems discovered and specific opinions put forward by the supervisors in their daily work.

3.3 Student-centered Surveys and Forums: A Normalized Multi-channel Mechanism for Quality Information Collection & Response

In order to meet the needs demanded by “the times of quality” and respond to the “student-centered” higher education quality management philosophy advocated by modern education, ZY University has adopted various methods, channels, and mechanisms to promote students' participation in sustainable education and quality management, to help them find more inspiration in quality activities and join the practice of quality management actively, and therefore, to create a set of normalized “student-centered” multi-channel system for quality information collection and response. A normalized mechanism in education quality data collection, data organization, and data evaluation is definitely beneficial for the university to fully promote its students' participation in theoretical research and practical exploration of higher education quality assurance.

This student-centered education quality management system mainly includes the collection of quality information, data analysis, quality evaluation, response action and the corresponding feedback of effects, which usually starts from a series of student-centered surveys and forums, ranging from the survey of “Students' Satisfaction on Teaching Quality” and special symposiums for particular questions, to class-based exchanges on teaching and learning and monthly forums on quality reports. Taking the student's satisfaction survey on teaching quality as an example, ZY University has formulated its rules on action and issued the “Implementation Measures for Teaching Satisfaction Survey”. In order to accurately understand students' opinions and suggestions on the sustainable education and quality management, Student-centered Surveys and Forums (SSF) have been launched in accordance with the essential requirements of the establishment and development of quality monitoring and control system in private higher education institutions. Via the use of modern educational technology, the conduction of scientific sampling surveys, ZY University persists in collecting advices and opinions from its students in terms of sustainable quality management. With a focus on more than 20 indexes of quality assessment like talent cultivation, curriculum design, faculty allocation, professional development, course planning, credit allocation, practical arrangements, assessment methods, classroom quality, teaching and learning facilities, recreational activities, campus environment, efficiency expectations, and management services, etc., the results of data analysis based on SSF are ultimately presented to quality management groups in the form of paper reports, mathematical statistics or distribution charts (as shown in Figure 1) to promote an accurate evaluation, monitoring, and improvement of ZY's higher education quality.

The Survey Result of Students' Satisfaction to Learning in ZY University: A Histogram, April of 2021.

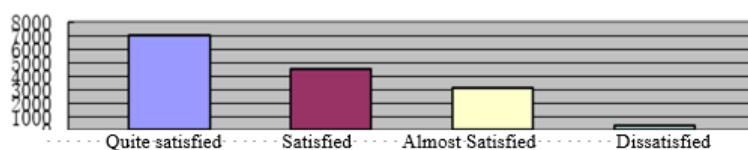


Figure 1: The Distribution of Students' Satisfaction to Learning: A Survey from the ZY University (2021.04)

In addition, to ensure the accuracy, pertinence, and timeliness of the data about educational quality that collected by SSF, ZY University has also established various forms of symposiums and class-based exchange meetings. Theme arranged meetings such as postgraduate entrance examination symposiums, college English exam symposiums, professional qualification application symposiums, as well as some specially arranged meetings on irregular issues as orientation symposiums and graduate symposiums, have greatly promoted the improvement of class teaching efficiency and the development of talent's training programs; The election of a class-based information exchanger and the quality opinion leader has greatly improved the efficiency and ultimate effectiveness of sustainable education quality management in this private university.

For those faculties, departments and offices that are expected to be responsible for quality control, monitoring and management, ZY University has also established a dedicated quality management office

in charge of quality administration and management in the entire university. With the support of the Academic Affairs Office, Scientific Research Office, all secondary faculties, and educational research centers, the Education Quality Management Office (EQMO) conducts monthly statistics, compiles, and distributes the “the Report on ZY University’s Quality Management”, and utilizes different paper columns for exchange of information and the spread of innovations. Many articles, papers are published by EQMO have conducted some macro, micro, theoretical and practical analyses to question, to answer, to conclude, to summary and to share their ideas in education quality management and sustainability in higher private education.

3.4 Other Sustainable Education Quality Management Systems and Their Achievements

It is worth mentioning that in addition to the various practical models and institutional innovations mentioned above, ZY University has also established a series of sustainable education quality management and guarantee systems, including routine teaching inspections, initial and final inspections, test inspections, and paper inspections; they have formulated action plans for improving the quality of higher education such as:

- “to Eliminate Poor-designed Class and to Find Gold-valued Lectures”;
- to join the provincial “Pilot Curriculum Project in Morality and Politics”;
- to introduce some flexible policies in the recruitment, the use, and the nurturing of talents;
- to strictly implement the “Curriculum Quality Evaluation Standards” and the “Standards for Teaching Quality Evaluation”;
- to adhere to the weekly tradition in studies on teaching and learning and to ensure the young generation of faculty are well guided by the senior generation;
- to strengthen the mechanisms of self-evaluation and mutual evaluation between teachers and students,
- to highlight the intra- and inter-assessment of teaching quality as well as a full self diagnosis in real teaching and learning practice;
- to pay attention to improving the building of blind assessment and evaluation mechanism by peers and experts outside of campus.

Through the comprehensive application of all the sustainable education quality management mechanisms mentioned above, ZY University has made a significant progress and some impressive achievements in daily education management and quality development, which can be found in many aspects like its teaching awards, their academic findings, the population of enrollment, the experts that employed, their practice in class teaching, the prizes awarded after competitions, the rank of faculties and their influence among China’s private institutions. Particularly, in the past two years when facing adverse factors such as the risk of the epidemic, ZY University has successively been granted with 43 national level research projects and won two research centers from China’s Ministry of Education.

4. Discussion: Problems and Challenges in Sustainable Education Quality Management in Private Universities

As a private higher education institution with good development momentum, ZY University has established a series of systems and mechanisms in sustainable education and quality management, achieving good results and benefits, which can definitely bring inspirations for the development and advancement of China’s quality management in private higher education institutions. Due to its early exploration and development of quality management, however, there are still some problematic issues in terms of quality and sustainability commonly shared by many public and private colleges and universities in their practice in operation and their process for prosperity. In spite of the quality management system, which remains to be unsettled among many private institutions, some inborn challenges that are solely developed from private institutions also come into being. Typically, these include the extreme marketization and excessive commercialization of quality control and quality evaluation in both standard setting and exercise.

In fact, after the introduction of the concept of quality from the field of business administration into the field of higher education, especially with the emergence and then the surge expansion of diversified

private education entities, the philosophy of quality management and its exploration and practice in China's higher education have inevitably encountered a contradiction between different interests and the alienation of short-term goals, resulting in the short-sighted phenomenon of excessive marketization and utilitarianism in the quality management of private universities.

4.1 The Insufficiency in Third-party Evaluation and Regulatory Monitoring System

With the deepening development of China's market economy, the regulatory role of market mechanisms in higher education quality management is becoming increasingly apparent. The dominance of market-oriented governance and control in global education circles has also side effects on scholarship in Chinese higher education. Some western scholars' call for project governance and contract governance has increasingly won its popularity in China's higher education quality management. At the same time, the Chinese authority in higher education starts to promote its transformation from the previous role of sponsor and supervisor into of a new role of guider and supporter. By the adoption of the so-called "Separation between Management and Evaluation" policy in higher education, China's MOE has deepened the implementation of its educational reform, namely, "to streamline the government, delegating power, and improving the government services".

Under such circumstances, resources from all industries, enterprises, communities, associations, social teams, and non-governmental organizations have been increasingly participating in the sustainable quality management of higher education. Collaborative cooperation and joint supervision of the industrial professionals, academic experts, and research scholars, according to Li (2021) and Hu (2021); have gradually dominated the main development direction of higher education and quality management. It is now the times for third-party institutions as service providers to offer their help in developing qualified management and evaluation for Chinese private higher education.

From the case of ZY University and many others we can find, however, that there are still some problematic issues in the third-party's role in sustainability and quality management of China's higher education, including its weakness in internal professionalism and its insufficiency as an external guarantee (Li, 2021). This is especially true for those third-parties' performance in the quality management practice of China's private universities. Based on the analysis above, it can be seen that in the existing education quality management system of ZY University, the role of third-party's supervision and evaluation is not yet prominent enough, and its value and role in improving the sustainable education quality management of the university still need to be further strengthened and then, better improved.

4.2 Urgent Demands for an Organizational Quality Culture Construction

For a long time, there has been a phenomenon in traditional quality management that has highlighted the importance of teaching rather than that of innovation, with too much emphasis over effects rather than processes, on theoretic hypotheses than real-world practices, or overstatement of role of systems than the value of ideas. The severe imbalance caused by the long established "normalizing system of appraisal accountability" among higher institutions will easily lead to the formation of a short-sighted quality management model in Chinese universities; which seems to mistake the scores of evaluations as the signs of their development. This has led to some colleges and universities often paying more attention to the fake images outside their quality management rather than the real selves in the education practice; the result of which are not good to the sustainable development of private education quality management.

The construction of educational quality culture seems to increasingly urgent for China's private universities just because there are so many misunderstandings or inappropriate actions in quality management practice. They are mainly reflected in the over emphasis on the numbers and digitals rather than the quality and structures. Many other indicators as quality evaluation standards have also over stated the quantity of teaching and research resources such as books and journals we bought or published and experimental devices we had, but having neglected the support level of school teaching and research resources for students' development in personality and ability (Liu, 2021).

In fact, higher education quality management has to some extent become a "utilitarian tool" for precise control and management of higher education quality elements and processes. Many universities are increasingly emphasizing the standardization and refinement of quality assurance standards, procedures, and technologies, but having neglected the establishment of a scientific and reasonable sustainable quality management strategy and mechanisms. From this perspective, ZY University still needs to pay its efforts in contributing more in private higher education quality explorations.

4.3 An Overemphasis on Students' Personal Needs with Ignorance of Public Interests

Compared to public universities which are long founded in history, full of richness in administrative experience and supporting resources, private colleges and universities are in a relatively disadvantaged position in terms of educational qualifications, professional status, teaching software, as well as the funding programs and working facilities. The lack of enough resources has certainly resulted in their relatively weak positions in appealing students' application and enrollment. Therefore, the opinions, interests, and needs of students play a very prominent role in the sustainable quality management of private higher education. The quality standards derived from the market economy principle emphasize customer centeredness (Du, 2021), similar to that of the education cost sharing mechanism of private universities, which normally indicates that whoever pays the cost has the right to demand equivalent service from higher education institutions. The popular belief in the rule of market economy principle and the rule of exchange at equal values, has more or less aroused an excessive attention to the needs of students in the quality management process.

The overemphasis of students' personal needs can be easily found in most of the private institutions around the world. There is not one single exception. Like many other private higher learnings, ZY University highly values students' demands in its quality evaluation design and quality management practice. Therefore, just stated above, students' satisfaction to teaching and learning, their opinions on course evaluation, their suggestions and complaints have formed a solid foundation for the measure design, the strategy promotion and the action enforcement of its higher education quality assurance system. The detailed statistics as the graduates' rate of employment, their first-month salary, and their social, economic as well as political positions have also become important factors for standards in measuring sustainable quality in ZY University. Even more than that, indicators as students' satisfactions and personal preferences have been included into the main framework as evaluations for management performance and faculty promotions. Satisfactions to students' needs rather than the public interests are viewed as an essential part of the institutional criteria of rewarding which functions as an important tool of job assessment and employment evaluation. The demand of "multiple standards" made by sustainable quality management philosophy has more or less been alienated into a single evaluation model that takes students' personal needs as their sole criterion.

4.4 An Overuse of Marketization Rules and Over Application of Business Value Principles

This is mainly reflected in the frequent and excessive use of market elimination mechanisms and commercial value rules in talent recruitment, teachers' promotion, and quality evaluation; and there is a trend of generalization and infiltration into fields such as curriculum teaching, experimental operations, disciplinary competitions, and academic development. Although the market-oriented competition mechanism and the principle of equivalent exchange can bring many new inspirations to the quality management of higher education, their side effects are also very obvious, such as simplifying the handling of quality management tasks, fluctuating or even temporary talent incentive models, fragmented management strategies, and short-term policy mechanisms. Private universities often lack patience and long-term consideration in sustainable quality management, and overly rely on such rules and principles as market efficiency and commercial value, which can lead to utilitarian and market-oriented tendencies in higher education quality management. They also often use so-called third-party standards, disregarding the school's real context and long-term goals, but to carry out some simplified or one-sided operations.

ZY University has also suffered a lot from the overuse of marketization rules and by the over application of business value principles. Data shows that ZY University, as a private-run higher education institution, does fully utilize its advantages in flexible mechanisms of adaption to different situations, high efficiency in choice-making, and strong awareness of market competition to achieve its excellence in some urgent and difficult issues in a short period of time. It is still unable, however, to overcome its inherent defect of shortsightedness. The frequent shifts of managing personnels, the quick flow of talents running out the campus, the short-termed design of projects, and the irregular changes in quality policies and regulations can all cause instability in the management system, resulting in a loss of continuity in pursuing its long-term targets. And it is hard for ZY University to achieve its sustainability in quality management if it cannot deal with the mentioned challenges well enough.

5. Conclusion

From all above, it is not difficult to find that on the one hand, the in-depth development of higher education quality management research provides a theoretical support as well as a practical reference for the construction of quality management systems for private higher education institution. On the other

hand, the summary of experience and research on sustainable education quality management in private universities also provide us new ideas for the theoretical development and practical exploration of higher education quality management in China.

ZY University, as a developing private undergraduate institution in China, has initially established a relatively effective education quality management model inspired by the research results of higher education quality management in the new era. However, at the same time, the university has also encountered various problems and challenges in introducing external evaluation mechanisms and in establishing its own quality culture. To address these issues and challenges, the university has currently proposed and is now taking actions in five sustainable strategies, namely “Innovation”, “Specialization”, “Profession”, “Localization”, and “Internationalization”. By these strategies and actions, ZY University is now striving to build a “first-class” private university in China known with excellent brands and ages of history, and prepared to cultivate high-quality of talents who are expected to have “international horizon, Chinese sentiment, and social responsibility”.

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