

Difficulties and Solutions of Part-time Graduate Admissions in China

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Abstract— *Part-time postgraduate education and full-time postgraduate education are complementary in function, and jointly improve China's degree and postgraduate education system. Since the implementation of the combined training of the two types of graduate students, part-time graduate education, especially the admissions process, has encountered some difficulties, which need to be resolved urgently, such as fewer applicants, lower initial admission rates, difficulty in adjusting admissions, and diverse student structure, etc. The main reason is that the social recognition of part-time graduate students is low, and the social stereotype of the dwarf status of part-time graduate students has not changed. In order to effectively solve the above problems and improve China's postgraduate education methods, specific suggestions are put forward.*

Keywords— *Part-Time Graduate Students; Enrollment; Dilemma; Countermeasures.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Postgraduate education is of great significance, related to personnel cultivation and competition, and is an important guarantee for the national innovation system. At present, China's postgraduate education mainly has two modes, namely full-time and part-time. Part-time postgraduate education and full-time postgraduate education are complementary in function, and jointly improve China's degree and postgraduate education system (Kumar and Kumar, 2020). Part-time postgraduate education mainly recruits on-the-job staff and adopts the learning method of not leaving the post when entering school. Its purpose is to perfect and improve the professional knowledge system and professional working ability of the employed (Neuhaus et al., 2012). In China, the concept of "graduate student" was first born in the late Qing dynasty. After the founding of new China, social development has gradually stabilized, the country's demand for highly educated talents has become increasingly urgent, and graduate education has received increasing attention. In the 1980s, China gradually started the work of applying for a master's degree and doctor's degree by personnel with the same academic level. In the 1990s, China began to try to develop a professional degree in postgraduate education. In 1997, the state started the recruitment and training of on-the-job personnel for master's degrees. For a long time, applying for a degree with the same academic level and studying for a master's degree (professional degree) by on-the-job personnel have become the main ways of part-time postgraduate education in China. The original

intention of the state to carry out part-time postgraduate education is to meet the educational needs of on-the-job staff, who are the main source of part-time postgraduate students. In September 2016, Since the implementation of the combined training of the two types of graduate students, which will come into effect from 2017. It will standardize and promote the education of part-time graduate students in China, clarify the requirements of quality standards for part-time graduate education, and make up for the lack of time limit for full-time graduate education. China has clearly described the concept of full-time and part-time graduate students. Part-time graduate students carry out a part-time study while completing their jobs, with various and flexible learning methods. In China, full-time graduate students and part-time graduate students work out enrollment plans at the same time, organize enrollment examinations and admissions in a unified way, adhere to the same educational quality standards, and do a good job in the management of academic degree certificates. The key point is that for the newly recruited two types of graduate students, both the examination and enrollment policies and the cultivation standards are the same, and the academic degree certificates obtained by part-time graduate students are completely equal to full-time graduate students in terms of legal status and effectiveness (Santos, 2020). The unified cultivation of the two types of graduate students is an important practice in China's graduate education. It reflects the change of the development direction of China's graduate education from large-scale development to

connotative development, reflects the higher requirements of the times for the improvement of the quality of graduate education, and marks that China's graduate education has entered a new developmental milestone.

As the key to education reform, the entrance examination system and the examination system are most likely to attract the attention of the general public. Since 2017, the enrollment of part-time graduate students has only increased as a hot topic of public opinion. On the one hand, the enrollment policy is related to the vital interests of tens of millions of students. On the other hand, as the redistribution of educational resources, educational reform is bound to lead to the re-discussion of educational fairness and justice in public opinion, as well as the existing problems and solutions in current education, especially part-time postgraduate education (Ho et al., 2012). Zhu et al. (2019) combed the development process and change direction of China's graduate enrollment system since the founding of new China 70 years ago and believed that appropriate reforms should be carried out in the aspects of enrollment unit's autonomy in running schools, students' free choice, and social needs. Zhou and Cao (2018) combed the concept and characteristics of part-time graduate students, analyzed the new situation of the unified enrollment of graduate students, discussed the existing problems and challenges at this stage, and believed that connotation development is the only way to develop part-time graduate education. Part-time graduate students study for a master's degree in a non-full-time way, which is a useful supplement to China's graduate education and promotes the overall construction of China's graduate education.

II. ENROLLMENT DILEMMA

Postgraduate education is divided into full-time and part-time postgraduate students according to their different learning methods. Since the implementation of the combined training of the two types of graduate students, part-time graduate students and full-time graduate students are not only different in name but also different in internal development. Besides, there have been some difficulties in part-time graduate cultivation and education, especially in the enrollment process. Countermeasures need to be studied and effectively solved. In order to better analyze the problem, this paper takes Anhui University's law master (illegal studies) postgraduate enrollment as an example to discuss and make a brief analysis.

The discipline of law at Anhui University enjoys a high reputation in Anhui Province and even in China. Since 1999, Anhui University has started to recruit a master of law. It is one of the 22 universities that started to recruit and cultivate master of law on an earlier pilot basis. It is also one of the 19 universities that carried out a comprehensive reform pilot of master of law degree postgraduate education in 2010. It has rich experience and history in running schools and has certain representativeness. Before 2016, Anhui University's Master of Laws (illegal studies) will enroll both full-time graduate students and documentary graduate students who work for master's degrees. After the merger in 2016, the master of law (illegal studies) will continue to enroll full-time and part-time graduate students. After the implementation of the merger policy, both the number of part-time graduate students enrolled and the admission situation have changed compared with the past. This article investigated and counted the full-time and part-time students of Anhui University's Master of Law (illegal studies) in the past three years, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Full-time and Part-time Students for Master of Laws (illegal studies) in Anhui University from 2017 to 2019

Year	2017		2018		2019	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Learning style						
Number of applicants (person)	443	254	690	374	772	433
Percentage of applicants (%)	63.56	36.44	64.85	35.15	64.07	35.93
Number of initial admission (person)	182	16	151	9	232	23
Initial admission rates (%)	41.08	6.30	21.88	2.41	30.05	5.31
Planned enrolment number (person)	84	41	80	35	76	50
Admission number(person)	84	41	80	16	76	44
Admission rates (%)	100.00	100.00	100.00	45.71	100.00	88.00
Number of one volunteer candidate admitted (person)	84	15	80	9	76	21
Proportion of one volunteer candidate admitted (%)	100.00	36.59	100.00	56.25	100.00	47.73

Note: a. Proportion to the total number of candidates refers to the proportion of all kinds of graduate candidates to the total number of two kinds of graduate candidates; b. Initial admission rates are expressed by the ratio of the number of people who have reached the national line to the number of postgraduate candidates; c. Admission rates are expressed as the ratio of the number of students admitted to the planned number of students; d. The proportion of one volunteer candidate admitted is expressed as the ratio of the number of one volunteer candidate admitted to the number of admitted candidates. All ratios are expressed as percentages, with two decimal places reserved.

According to table 1, part-time postgraduate enrollment mainly has the following problems.

1) Fewer applicants

Table 1 shows that from 2017 to 2019, the number of candidates for the two types of graduate students increased year by year, but compared with full-time graduate students, the number of part-time graduate students with one volunteer candidate was significantly smaller. In 2017, the proportion of part-time graduate students to volunteer candidates was about 36.44%, in 2018 it was about 35.15%, and in 2019 it was about 35.93%. It can be seen that in the past three years, less than 40% of part-time graduate students have taken part in one volunteer, with the largest proportion in 2017. Therefore, the scale of part-time graduate students is obviously insufficient and there is great potential for development.

2) Lower initial admission rates

According to Table 1, the number of candidates for part-time graduate students in 2017 was 254, of which the number of eligible candidates was 16, with an eligible rate of about 6.30%. The number of applicants in 2018 was 374, of which the number of reaching the national line was 9, and the initial admission rates fell to only 2.41%. In 2019, 433,23 applicants reached the national line standard, with a slight increase of 5.31%. In comparison, from 2017 to 2019, the initial admission rates of full-time graduate students are 41.08%, 21.88%, and 30.05% respectively. Whether one-sided analysis of part-time postgraduates' initial admission rates or comparison with full-time postgraduates' initial admission rates, although the number of part-time postgraduates' one volunteer candidates is increasing year by year, the main source of students is on-the-job personnel, and most of the candidates have a weak foundation, so it is difficult to reach the national line standard in the preliminary examination and the initial admission rates are relatively low.

3) Difficulty in adjusting admissions

According to the survey, in the past three years, the

number of one volunteer candidate admitted for a full-time master of law (illegal studies) has exceeded the enrollment plan, and it is possible to complete the enrollment plan by enrolling one volunteer candidate. For part-time candidates, the number of lines reached by one volunteer candidate each year is lower than the enrollment plan, and even the enrollment plan cannot be completed through student source adjustment. In 2018, Anhui University's part-time master of law (illegal studies) graduate program enrolled 35 students, and one volunteer candidate had 9 informants. All of them were accepted. Seven candidates were transferred to the program, with a total of 16 enrolled. However, the enrollment plan has still not been completed and the admission rate is only 45.71%.

Combined with existing research (Yang et al., 2017, Du et al., 2019), the student source organization of part-time postgraduate education still has problems in the student source structure.

4) Diverse student structure

In recent years, with the reform of postgraduate cultivation mode, the demand for academic qualifications from people from all walks of life, and the promotion of school-enterprise joint cultivation of talents, China's part-time postgraduate education covers a wide range of students and its student source structure tends to develop in a diversified way, mainly in terms of professional background and social experience with previous academic qualifications. In terms of professional background, there are more part-time graduate students with a large span of professional background (Alrashdan et al., 2018). Some postgraduates are students who continue to study for their major. The purpose of their study is to master the frontier knowledge of their major, enhance their academic innovation ability and improve their professional knowledge level (Jung, 2019). There are also some graduate students who come from relevant on-the-job staff in professional fields. The purpose of their study is to enhance their professional work quality or meet the promotion conditions. Therefore, the professional backgrounds of part-time graduate students in the same major may differ greatly. As far as social experience is concerned, the social experience of part-time graduate students is uneven. Based on different working backgrounds (such as state-owned enterprises, institutions or others), different graduate students have different social experiences. Some graduate students have experience in scientific research projects due to professional factors, while others have only a superficial level of basic knowledge, resulting in a large gap in their theoretical foundation and professional ability.

III. REASON ANALYSIS

China pays more and more attention to part-time postgraduate education, and the society's demand for high-level talents is continuously rising. With the continuous advancement of reform, part-time postgraduate education has become more mature and standardized. This paper explores the problems existing in part-time graduate education enrollment. How to better solve the above problems is a big thing to be considered at this stage. Before putting forward specific countermeasures, this paper explores the reasons behind the problems.

1) The social recognition of part-time graduate students is low, and the social stereotype of the dwarf status of part-time graduate students has not changed

Although the academic degree certificates of full-time and part-time graduate students have the same legal status and the same effect in China, in fact, the fact that part-time graduate students were dwarfed in the past has not changed. From the perspective of school management, the vast majority of schools still implement the old-style model. Part-time graduate students are neither able to receive school research grants nor are they able to enjoy academic scholarships and state scholarships. Most of them do not be arranged accommodation during their studies. Some universities even do not allow part-time graduate students to borrow books from the library. From a social point of view, the social stereotype effect generally believes that part-time graduate students are mostly "dawdle academic qualifications". Some employers even explicitly stated in the recruitment announcement that "part-time graduate students are not accepted". On the Internet, there is also a gradual emergence of "it will be much more difficult for part-time graduate students to settle in Beijing in 2018!" part-time master's degree students cannot enter Beijing's registered permanent residence" and other discussion topics. From a student's perspective, candidates applying for part-time postgraduate education hope to obtain postgraduate qualifications through this learning method, so as to meet the basic conditions for job promotion and salary improvement in the unit. They hope to evaluate their learning results according to the old standards. There is even inappropriate thinking of "Buying academic qualifications", which is a certain utility. The words "part-time" learning styles are clearly printed on academic degree certificates, which also makes many part-time graduate students deepen their dwarf status awareness.

2) The weaker attraction of part-time postgraduate cultivation

In the past, the attraction of the cultivation mechanism for part-time graduate students, besides providing the

convenience of work-study combination and flexible time for professional applicants, lies to a greater extent in the fact that its quality standard is objectively lower than that of full-time graduate students, which not only meets the applicants' academic demands but also takes into account the reality of the applicants' basic ability level. According to the combined cultivation of the two types of graduate students, the advantage of a low threshold no longer exists, and the time arrangement is not an insurmountable obstacle to some extent. The flexible advantage of part-time graduate students over full-time graduate students is no longer obvious. Under the unified quality standard, candidates with a good foundation, instead of entering for part-time graduate students, should have more or less the idea of "overcoming the difficulties and studying for full-time graduate students". Although the number of candidates for both types of graduate students in the table has greatly increased, it can be judged from the decrease in the admission rate of part-time graduate students that the increase in the number of full-time graduate students to enter the examination largely comes from the decrease in the number of outstanding students among the candidates for part-time graduate students.

3) Unguaranteed teaching effect of part-time graduate students

At present, for most universities, part-time postgraduate teaching styles generally adopt "weekend classes" and "centralized classes". "Weekend Class" is a class arranged on Saturdays and Sundays. The "concentrated class" mainly focuses on studying for about 6 days during the small long holidays such as May Day and National Day each semester and focuses on studying for 5 to 6 times each semester. Whether it is weekend class or concentrated class, there are problems that cannot be guaranteed in-class hours. Teachers often talk in series and in general. The learning effect mainly depends on the part-time graduate students to preview more before class, review more after class, consult more and communicate more when having difficulties in learning, the actual effect is not satisfactory. The biggest characteristic of part-time graduate education is to study while working, and not to leave the post when school. Moreover, many part-time graduate students are the backbone of the unit's business. Their own work tasks are very heavy, so their study time is limited, and the contradiction between work and study is inevitable. Generally speaking, the major chosen by part-time graduate students often depends on the work they are engaged in at the present stage, which is quite different from the major they studied before. The learning basis is uneven, the quality of students is not high, and there are many difficulties in their own learning. Moreover, the time

for students to communicate and discuss face to face with teachers is very limited. The students have smaller time in school and cannot make good use of teaching resources such as school books and materials. Although the network and information technology are developed today, most part-time graduate students have established communication platforms such as class WeChat group and QQ group, but there is not much discussion about study in the group, and the teaching effect is not optimistic due to various factors (Sran and Murphy, 2009).

4) The student structure changes

After the reform of graduate education, both part-time and full-time graduate students need to take the national unified examination. Compared with fresh graduates, the on-the-job staff is busy with their work, so that their energy is limited and the ability to take examinations is weaker and difficult to take unified examination subjects as a result (Ho et al., 2016). If full-time candidates fail to reach the required standard, they can switch to part-time study. On the one hand, fresh candidates have a congenital advantage, on the other hand, this will dampen the enthusiasm of on-the-job personnel to apply for part-time graduate students. In the long run, the source of part-time graduate students will change from "on-the-job" to "fresh graduates".

5) Policy restrictions on funding affect the quality of cultivation

In China, the national grant for postgraduate covers all full-time postgraduate students in the national postgraduate enrollment plan. That is to say, part-time graduate students neither receive state funding nor enjoy the state's funding policy. According to this policy, part-time training funds are difficult to guarantee, and the training units in colleges and universities do not pay enough attention to such graduate students, which will also affect the quality of training.

6) "Full-time" candidates are forced to make do with "part-time"

In the process of recruiting students in the past two years, many candidates who originally applied for full-time study have been transferred to a "part-time" study due to their low scores and low ranking, which are restricted by the full-time postgraduate enrollment plan. Many fresh undergraduates or unemployed people gave up the courage to fight again in the coming year and chose to study part-time graduate students with the mentality of "Compromise out of consideration for the general interest". At the same time, it is difficult for some schools to enroll part-time students. Some majors can only enroll a few graduate students and cannot set up separate classes. They take the way of allowing part-time graduate students and

full-time graduate students to attend classes together and be trained together. As a result, these part-time graduate students have not received the convenience of part-time training and are cultivated on a full-time basis, but cannot enjoy the national policy and obtain the "part-time" academic degree certificate. These current situations have resulted in the subsequent candidates rejecting the "part-time" form, preferring to give up the transfer to "part-time" and striving to be admitted as "full-time" graduate students next year.

IV. COUNTERMEASURES

With the development of economy and society, the country's demand for scientific and technological talents, innovative talents, scarce talents, and professional talents is increasingly urgent. In the new era of knowledge explosion, the previous postgraduate education pattern can no longer meet the current people's learning needs for knowledge and culture. The comprehensive consideration of full-time postgraduate and part-time postgraduate, the implementation of educational reform, is conducive to the full play of educational functions, response to the concept of "lifelong learning", improves the "lifelong learning" system, and builds a learning society.

It is the general trend to do a good job in part-time postgraduate education. In order to solve the problems existing in the current part-time postgraduate enrollment, this paper believes that the current part-time postgraduate education policy must be reformed.

1) Return to the source, respect the law, cancel the two types of enrollment plan issued separately

In the 1990s, Chinese postgraduate students were divided into full-time postgraduate students and on-the-job part-time postgraduate students according to their learning methods. At present, master's degree students are divided into full-time master's degree students and part-time master's degree students according to their learning methods. That is to say, the main difference between full-time and part-time graduate students in the form of learning, which should be divided according to the learning method after the graduate students enter the school, rather than being determined at the time of admission. When the graduate enrollment plan was issued, full-time and part-time students were clearly divided into two categories. When the graduate students were admitted, the full-time and part-time learning forms were clearly defined, and the learning forms could not be changed after admission. The full-time and part-time enrollment plans could not be adjusted and used for each other. Part-time became the status of students. It is suggested that the national education authority should further expand the

autonomy of colleges and universities, implement the reform of "release management service", cancel the current graduate enrollment practice and return to part-time education itself. No longer distinguish between full-time and part-time when making the postgraduate enrollment plan and admission. After the postgraduate enters the school, the principle of seeking truth from facts shall be applied to determine whether it is full-time or part-time, so as to avoid the problems of poor quality of part-time students and forced "part-time" and so on.

2) To establish a complete credit system and a relatively flexible academic system according to time and conditions

It is inevitable that part-time graduate students have work-study conflicts, and normal study may often be interfered with by other factors such as work. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a complete credit system and a well-regulated system. Among them, part-time graduate students should be properly extended their study years to carry out system standardization. Under the reasonable system guarantee, on the one hand, postgraduate students can be guaranteed to choose full-time or part-time study according to their actual situation. On the other hand, help part-time graduate students choose courses to study according to their own working conditions. In addition, we should strengthen the concept of the complete credit system, set up a system of separation of teaching and examination, carry out the strict examination of course study, and ensure that the corresponding credits can be obtained only after passing the examination, so as to realize strict entry and strict exit. At the same time, by appropriate methods such as length of schooling, replacing the words "part-time" on the academic degree certificate, and adopting online teaching methods (Huang, 2010), the difference between the two kinds of cultivation methods is changed from the perspective of education authorities and managers.

3) Quality mainline, process management, to ensure the quality of cultivation in different stages

"Service Demand and Quality Improvement" is the core task of postgraduate reform. After the admission of graduate students, a systematic process should be implemented, including the formulation of training programs, the organization of curriculum teaching, practical teaching, mid-term assessment, opening reports, thesis writing, and defense. Ideological and political work runs through it. Strengthening the management of the training process according to the training objectives is the main means to ensure the training quality of part-time graduate students. It is strictly controlled. One process goes one by one. Only when one process is qualified can it

enter the next process. It is necessary to stick to the principle of one round at a time, pushing forward stubble pressing and implementing overall control. The state also needs to include part-time postgraduate education in the qualification assessment of degree authorization points. The degree theses of part-time postgraduate students should also be sampled equally according to the proportion to build a full-coverage internal and external quality monitoring and assurance system (Van den Bussche et al., 2017).

4) Flexible change, reform, and innovation build all kinds of information platform

To establish a part-time graduate training management information platform, enrich curriculum resources, to provide support for part-time graduates' anytime and anywhere participation in systematic or fragmented learning, so that part-time time convenience can be fully guaranteed. To improve the part-time postgraduate training information management system, at any stage of postgraduate training, tutors, managers, and postgraduates themselves can easily and clearly check the learning status of postgraduates in any process. For example, when the postgraduates begin the topic, tutors can easily query the postgraduate's pre-admission academic background, work experience, entrance examination, post-admission training plan, courses learned and learning results, etc. through the postgraduate training information system, and provide timely guidance and help to postgraduates to make up for the difference and to timely remind and urge postgraduates to keep moving forward on the path of degree.

5) Teach students in accordance with their aptitude and cultivate their personality, so as to stimulate the advantages of full-time graduate students in production, teaching, and research

Cultivating innovative talents for the country is the original heart of postgraduate education, and implementing personalized education is the fundamental guarantee for cultivating innovative talents. Part-time graduate students have different academic experience, work experience, and industry background, and many of their jobs are the practical departments of their major. In the process of part-time postgraduate training, schools should speed up the establishment of a training mechanism combining science and education with production and learning, strengthen practical advantages and cultivate high-level applied talents. Tutors should choose reasonable scientific research tasks for different postgraduates according to their knowledge base, interests and abilities, teach students in accordance with their aptitude, and pay attention to personalized training (Holian and Coghlan, 2013). When making the part-time postgraduate training plan, we should

fully consider its training objectives, design a reasonable teaching system, combine theory with practice, and focus on training the practical application ability of postgraduate students. Postgraduate tutors should also "recharge" in a timely manner, strengthen their understanding of the development of relevant industries, grasp the forefront of relevant industries in a timely manner, continuously improve the teaching content, and add new knowledge points, such as new case studies (Harland, 2014). We will carry out industry-university-research cooperation, improve the dual tutorial system, explore the establishment of a "graduate workstation" cooperative training base, and promote the transformation of scientific research fruits.

6) Change thoughts, raise awareness and correctly understand the new situation of part-time postgraduate education in China

In China, the recruitment and selection criteria for part-time graduate students are the same as full-time graduate students, as well as the training quality requirements. Under the new form, we must reposition and understand part-time graduate students. Graduate students, tutors, and training units must change their thoughts and have a correct understanding of part-time graduate education after the merger. We should fully understand that part-time postgraduate education and full-time postgraduate education after the merger are only different in learning forms. We should implement the same standards in training quality and strictly meet the same requirements in the training effect. The thought of part-time postgraduate candidates should be changed and followed up. The era of dawdle diplomas has become a thing of the past, and it is only true knowledge and ability orientation that is the absolute principle.

7) Strengthen management, ensure investment and train part-time postgraduates with all-round development in morality, intelligence, physique, arts, and labor

Colleges and universities should firmly grasp the correct direction of running schools and overcome the uncertainty of part-time postgraduate training. At the same time, optimize the curriculum system, teaching system, moral education system, and practical education system, and strive for the necessary input from the education authorities (Shafranov-Kutsev et al., 2017). Moral education is the fundamental task of education. Part-time postgraduate education must integrate moral education into all aspects of its training process, so that part-time postgraduate students can develop in an all-round way and improve their comprehensive ability together with students of various other training forms and stages. At the same time, guide all sectors of society to abandon the traditional

narrow thought and gradually have a correct understanding of part-time graduate students.

The construction of first-class universities must be based on high-level postgraduate education. In the new era, international competition is increasingly fierce. Whether it is an economic competition or military confrontation, it is ultimately the competition for talents. However, high-level and highly educated talents with innovative ability who master high-end technology are undoubtedly the core of competition (Gurevich et al., 2011). Part-time postgraduate education highlights the development concept of lifelong learning, is an important way to cultivate innovative talents in the country, is also a beneficial supplement to full-time postgraduate education, and plays an irreplaceable role. It is necessary to vigorously develop part-time postgraduate education, and at the same time to strengthen the management of part-time postgraduate education, so as to contribute to the cultivation of innovative talents and the improvement of the country's core competitiveness.

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