

Exploration and Practice of New Models for Assisting and Aiding Economically Disadvantaged Students in Universities

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Abstract: Assisting and aiding economically disadvantaged students in universities is an essential part of implementing the fundamental task of cultivating moral character, and a necessary requirement for improving the quality of student aid work and achieving educational equity. To establish a new model of targeted assistance that puts students at the center, universities need to effectively coordinate a four-in-one assistance system that includes student learning situations, school department characteristics, targeted assistance, and local policies, continuously improving its pertinence and effectiveness. This paper attempts to explore a new model for targeted assistance of economically disadvantaged students in universities. For a long time, universities have relied on a single method of financial aid to support students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, with the focus of assistance primarily on the students themselves. Mainly through government transfer payment means such as national student aid, universities have provided “life-saving aid” to students in need. However, this method alone is lacking in providing motivation and support to students in a holistic manner. The assistance provided to economically disadvantaged students is not just a routine task, but also an opportunity for breakthroughs in terms of improving the comprehensive quality of university students and cultivating pragmatic talents through effective support.

1. Introduction

As the tuition and living expenses for university students continue to rise and job pressure increases, it is a challenge that universities and society need to address in order to help students complete their studies successfully. In the new era, universities have more opportunities but also face more challenges. Although universities have implemented relevant financial aid measures for economically disadvantaged students, the traditional methods are unable to meet the needs of educating students and cannot solve the fundamental problems of material and spiritual deprivation faced by these students. According to a survey, the sense of achievement is an important yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of poverty alleviation policies for impoverished students [1]. Thus, universities must make improving students' comprehensive capabilities and fostering practical talents a key goal. On

the basis of material assistance, universities should combine poverty alleviation, motivation-building, and intelligence promotion to help students improve their abilities while providing them with a sense of belonging and spiritual sustenance, and carry out comprehensive education from various aspects, such as ideological, spiritual, and psychological, to promote the all-round development of university students in terms of morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor skills.

2. The Significance of Financial Aid to Students from Poor Families

Against the context of educational reform, universities continue to expand their scale of operation, and the population of economically disadvantaged students has also grown significantly. This group of students not only needs material assistance but also requires help in pursuing their studies, employment, and mental health. The establishment of a quantitative assessment system for targeted assistance to “difficult students” in universities can conduct in-depth and meticulous research on their situations, grasp their cognitive patterns and acceptance characteristics, and thereby unleash their subjectivity [2]. The primary mission of universities is to educate and cultivate students’ characters. By making character education the core and rooting it in morality, universities aim to cultivate talents who can shoulder the responsibility of national rejuvenation. The work of financial aid and education for economically disadvantaged students is not only related to the students themselves and their families but also affects social harmony and stability. It is an internal requirement for building a harmonious society and a moderately prosperous society [3]. Therefore, the financial aid and educational work of universities are important guarantees for achieving talent cultivation and educational equity, and it is the basic commitment of financial aid work to ensure that no student drops out of school due to financial difficulties.

3. Issues in the Current Work of Financial Aid for Economically Disadvantaged Students in Universities

3.1. Problem of difficulties in authenticating materials for identifying economically disadvantaged students

In accordance with the *Guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Five Other Relevant Government Departments on the Identification of Economically Disadvantaged Students* in 2018 [4], the completion of the *Student and Family Situation Investigation Form* and the *Application Form for Identifying Economically Disadvantaged Students* remains a crucial means by which universities identify students in need of financial assistance. While the removal of stamping and approval steps by local poverty alleviation offices and financial aid departments has rendered the process easier and less time-consuming for students, the reliance on self-declaration and personal assurances as the sole means of data collection has raised concerns about the accuracy and verifiability of the information provided. This may enable instances of dishonesty and undermine educational equity. Therefore, when identifying economically disadvantaged students, universities should engage in accurate and precise identification processes and ensure that the data is genuine and credible. In this context, it is essential to identify the root causes of financial hardships experienced by students and to offer assistance that is appropriately tailored to their needs. This approach will enable disadvantaged students to overcome the challenges they face and build the skills and competencies needed to become responsible, purposeful, and accomplished members of society.

3.2. Lack of educational content in financial aid methods

The current forms of financial aid provided by universities are relatively limited and tend to focus

on economic subsidies and some administrative tasks. Typically, these include various types of scholarships, grants, and other forms of local government subsidies. However, the establishment of student financial aid positions in universities has not yet met the required teacher-to-student ratio stipulated by the Ministry of Education. As a result, there is a dearth of personnel, and the tasks are often laborious, making it difficult to undertake a diverse range of activities. As the primary agents of communication and coordination between students and financial aid services in universities, counselors often face challenges such as high job mobility and tedious job content, which can lead to insufficient policy grasp, operational unfamiliarity, and a lack of professionalism. Additionally, economically disadvantaged students need more than just financial aid; they require guidance and mentorship in areas such as specialized knowledge, career development, and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, universities should focus on providing comprehensive and student-centered aid services aimed at improving the financial, educational, and personal development prospects of economically disadvantaged students.

3.3. Insufficient awareness of financial aid work

Providing financial aid to economically disadvantaged students during their critical period of mental and intellectual growth is a value that universities should uphold. In the new era, students have diversified development needs, and traditional aid models that solely provide financial support are too “mechanistic” and out of touch. It is essential for universities and relevant aid personnel to continuously improve their understanding of aid work and provide dual support - both financially and spiritually - to students, allowing them to feel a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in multiple aspects such as psychological well-being and independent thinking. This type of aid will help students build character traits such as self-reliance, confidence, and self-awareness.

4. Establishing a New Model of Collaborative Assistance for Individuals and Families

4.1. Combining the three-part assistance model of inspiring ambition, enriching knowledge, and alleviating poverty to enhance students' personal qualities

4.1.1. Strengthening the concept of aspiration-oriented education and human development

In practical aid work, counselors and school aid departments are usually the main vehicles that carry out aid work, but student organizations are also a special resource for work development. They have a wide coverage and rich content. Therefore, schools can use student organizations as a medium to carry out education through various angles such as ideological and political education and public welfare volunteer activities, improving the comprehensive abilities and qualities of impoverished students, and expanding their social network. This allows for the dual advancement of economic aid and quality improvement, improving the accuracy of aid and the rationality of the aid structure [5]. Economically disadvantaged students mostly come from marginalized areas, families with severe unexpected difficulties, low-income families, students with disabilities, and students who are unstable in poverty reduction. They are influenced by their family environment and are prone to psychological problems such as poor social skills, self-doubt, anxiety, and even depression. In specific work, attention should be paid to dynamic monitoring and psychological care for impoverished students, encouraging them to be self-reliant and to realize that they can help other people in need through their own efforts. This helps to cultivate gratitude in aided students and establish lofty aspirations.

4.1.2. Effectively carrying out knowledge-assistance work

Through the comprehensive evaluation of awards and financial aid programs such as national

scholarships, national encouragement scholarships, and national student aid, outstanding cases of student success stemming from self-reliance can be highlighted. Holding award ceremonies and widely publicizing these events would galvanize students to strive for their own personal growth, using the inspiring stories of exceptional impoverished students as a guiding example. This approach can stimulate internal motivation within impoverished university students, shifting aid work from merely alleviating economic difficulties to promoting personal and ideological growth [6]. Encouraging economically disadvantaged students to actively participate in various professional competitions, such as the Internet Plus and university entrepreneurship training programs, can also promote the development of their comprehensive qualities. By participating in these competitions and enhancing their confidence, students are given opportunities to improve their comprehensive skills.

4.1.3. Ensuring targeted poverty alleviation

In recent years, a comprehensive education assistance system has been established in various universities, consisting of national aid, university aid, and social donations. Different amounts of aid are provided for different types of impoverished students, including scholarships, student loans, encouragement scholarships, work-study programs, and other relevant aid programs such as tuition waivers, temporary difficulty allowances, and mandatory military service grants. Among these, scholarships have a broad scope of coverage and a wide range of recipients. Universities have a fixed number of scholarships available, and students who apply have the opportunity to receive assistance. Student loans, on the other hand, are a financial service-type of aid that is provided through lending. Students are required to repay the loans. The combination of these various education assistance projects and policies can help financially disadvantaged students complete their studies successfully, achieving the solemn promise of the authorities to ensure that “no student drops out of school due to financial difficulties”. This approach has achieved the established goal of educational poverty alleviation.

However, due to the large monetary amounts of these aid programs, they can sometimes be seen as a “windfall” opportunity. Some students fabricate their poverty status to apply for financial aid, but due to the large number of applicants, it can be difficult for evaluation committees to make precise determinations, particularly in the absence of punitive measures. As a result, it is important to establish quantitative indicators for economically disadvantaged students, conduct thorough investigations and adherences to standards, and strive for accuracy in information about financially disadvantaged students. This will ensure that every penny of aid funds is used effectively and efficiently.

4.2. Establishing a comprehensive in-and-out-of-class course assistance mechanism

Improving and innovating the aid and assistance system to ensure that financially disadvantaged students have access to fair and quality education and can successfully complete their studies is an important task for universities [7]. In the classroom, it is essential to integrate ideological and political education into the entire process of university aid, strengthen the ideological and political education of students, and cultivate their character of self-improvement and courage to challenge fate, while also honing their honesty and trustworthiness. On the one hand, it is necessary to strengthen ideological and political education in professional courses, through the study of basic courses such as *Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Foundations*, *General Outline of Chinese Modern and Contemporary History*, and *Situation and Policy*, to integrate ideological and political education into student learning, guiding students to establish a good character of honesty and trustworthiness, as well as correct values. On the other hand, universities should conduct ideological and political-themed class meetings and integrity education activities to increase the attractiveness of ideological and

political education. In addition to monitoring attendance, professional teachers can open research projects in conjunction with professional courses, actively engage in student academic counseling and career planning work through participation in student internships, employment, postgraduate study campaigns, thematic group activities, and other avenues. Outside the classroom, the focus should be on solving students' individual, practical, and developmental problems, actively conducting various types of competition activities, and expanding innovative "second classrooms", to enhance students' practical abilities. University teachers must adapt to the new thinking of contemporary university students, observe new problems from a new perspective, and use new media such as WeChat, short video platforms, and TikTok to explore new teaching ideas. Incentivizing learning through competition, actively organizing various theme-based essay competitions, leveraging professional advantages, and opening a variety of elective courses to all students, such as interpersonal communication, popular culture research, Chinese and foreign literature appreciation, practical English, and European travel and cultural discussion, will be beneficial.

4.3. Guiding aid for financially disadvantaged students towards employment to eradicate the root of poverty in their families

Students from financially disadvantaged families often find themselves in a passive position in the aid and assistance process, developing a strong dependence on aid policies and becoming accustomed to passively receiving aid. This approach neglects that the root cause of their economic difficulties lies in their families rather than the students themselves, and it does not address the difficult root of the aid recipient. Therefore, it is important to explore how to fully leverage local industry advantages and labor demands to effectively link student aid work, transform "passive aid" to "active self-help", and achieve a win-win situation among families, schools, local communities, and enterprises.

To address the contradiction between the widespread economic difficulties among aid recipients and the shortage of labor in local industries, it is necessary to establish an employment platform jointly with the local department of human resources and social security. The platform should target economically disadvantaged students and parents of out-of-town students and expand the aid from students to their families. This approach will transform the aid from "passive aid" to "self-sustaining" aid. By promoting the full employment of students' parents, the economic conditions of families can be effectively improved, achieving the goal of aid and assistance. This approach not only benefits economically disadvantaged families but also reduces the economic and psychological pressures on students and enables them to focus on their studies. It can also alleviate the long-standing problem of "labor shortages" in certain areas, achieving multiple benefits with one action. To encourage students to actively seek employment and enhance their socialization skills [8], both "offline" and "online" approaches should be used. Offline activities should focus on collaborating with the local department of human resources and social security to promote local enterprises and job opportunities to new students and their parents during the September registration period. Online activities should involve building a job information sharing mechanism between the government's public employment platform and the university's employment information network. A job recruitment section dedicated to H city's job openings can be launched through the platform, and students can act as intermediaries to help their parents find job opportunities. By combining these approaches, students can make the transition from "passive aid" to "active self-help".

Employment is the foundation of people's livelihoods and the basis for the development of young people. It is necessary to work together with a focused and determined approach to help university students find employment. The construction of a full-cycle work and value chain [9] is critical in achieving this goal. There are several precise paths to resolve the employment difficulties of financially disadvantaged students. These include improving aid policies to increase the economic

capital of financially disadvantaged students, promoting equity in universities to increase their cultural capital, optimizing the human capital structure of financially disadvantaged students, expanding the quantity and improving the quality of their social capital [10]. Through joint efforts by schools, governments, enterprises, parents, and students, the goal of self-help to alleviate poverty can be achieved. This approach can be continuously improved and optimized to eventually form an effective, replicable, and sustainable aid work model.

5. Conclusions

In summary, aid work is an essential and rigorous part of supporting students, and it relates to the rights of every impoverished student to receive fair education and benefit from aid policies. Actively exploring new aid models in universities, focusing on student ideological and political education and comprehensive quality training, is the general trend of building an aid mechanism for nurturing students. Currently, the aid and assistance model in universities still needs to be further deepened and improved, with a range of measures taken that reflect humanistic care and spiritual attention. At the same time, the team building of aid and assistance needs to be strengthened, and effective strategies for aid and assistance in universities need to be continuously explored to improve the quality of aid work. Solving students' difficulties through economic aid, optimizing teaching concepts through curriculum education, and addressing students' practical issues through employment assistance, can help economically disadvantaged students feel hopeful and empowered, and they can become builders and successors of modern socialist society in the new era.

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