

A Study on the Performance Evaluation of Government Purchase of Educational Services

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Abstract: during the Operation of Purchasing Educational Services by the Government, It is Very Necessary to Evaluate Its Performance. At Present, the Government Has Not Realize the Importance of the Performance in the Process of Its Educational Purchase, and There Are Many Problems Such as No Special Governmental Agencies That Specializes in the Performance Evaluation, the Professional Talent Pool and Scientific Evaluation System Are Missing, and So on. Drawing Lessons from the Experience of Foreign Governments in Evaluating the Performance of Purchasing Educational Services. in Order to Improve the Efficiency of Purchasing Educational Services in Private Colleges and Universities by Public Finance, Except for the Further Construction of the Evaluation System, It is Necessary to Issue Relevant Laws and Regulations, Guide Opinions as Soon as Possible, Establish the Budget and Financial Management System for the Purchase of Educational Services by the Government, Perfect the Evaluation Procedure for the Purchase of Educational Services, and Establish the Mechanism for the Use of Evaluation Results, Give Full Play to the Role of Third-Party Evaluation Institutions.

1. Introduction

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At present, purchase of educational services by Chinese government is still in the exploratory stage, and there are some problems in the performance evaluation, such as the lack of institutionalization, which incurs somewhat disorder and arbitrariness, etc. Therefore, it is an important issue that is worthy to be studied for reducing the government cost, improving the service efficiency and realizing the expected effect.

2. Problems

2.1 Lack of Awareness of the Importance of Performance Evaluation

When a purchasing case is being considered, from the aspects of its arrangement and financial input, the buyers of some educational services pay less attention to the performance, or although they have considered the issue, their considerations are not scientific and in a all-round way, which leads to the emergence of some educational service purchases that have not been fully demonstrated have put into practice. After deciding buy the educational service programme, some buyers have no idea of time and cost for the implementation of the programme when they determine the specific purchase content and set up the expected goal, which leads to the scheduled programme can not be completed on time, and even the funds of the programme are squeezed and misappropriated. Because of the strong technical and professional nature of performance evaluation, for the relevant departments of the government, their understanding of performance evaluation is vague and even incorrect, and the performance evaluation is not regarded as the component of the purchase. Therefore, it is necessary to further deepen the understanding of the importance of performance evaluation and learn to master the relevant knowledge of performance evaluation.

2.2 No Special Institute for Performance Evaluation

Many western countries have set up special institutions for evaluating the public expenditure, which are parallel to other departments of the government, and which contains branch aiming at performance evaluation of educational services. From the current domestic situation, although the central government and most local governments have established its special agencies for evaluating the fiscal expenditure, or the financial departments at all levels have set up special agencies for the expenditure evaluation, there is no special institution has been established specifically for the performance evaluation of the purchase of public services (including educational services), which has hindered the further progress of this work.

2.3 Lack of Laws for Performance Evaluation.

At present, the central government and some local governments of China have issued the relevant institutions on the performance evaluation of government purchase for public services, which stipulates the content, scope, method, standard of the performance evaluation, etc., but these are not specifically targeted at the purchase of educational services. The particularity and complexity of education services distinguish them from other public services, such as the price of education services is more difficult to be calculated, the standard of “satisfaction” is more difficult to be described accurately, and the effect of education services often appears in a long period. Due to the lack of special policies and institutions and the inability to apply or copy the mechanism of purchasing other public services or the experiences in business enterprises completely, it can not directly supervise the government’s purchase activities for educational services by means of the performance evaluation; moreover, the positive functions of the result of performance evaluation such as guiding, referencing and supervising are lost to some extent, so that the performance evaluation is often superficial, which really blocks the further development of the work.

2.4 Professional Team and Scientific Evaluation System of Performance Evaluation Have Not Been Formed

At present, most provinces and cities in China have not formed a professional team in charge of performance evaluation of government’s educational service purchase. Performance evaluation not only involves the educational service programmes, but also involves the professional knowledge of finance, evaluation, benefit and so on. It needs the professionals with qualified knowledge and ability to carry out the performance evaluation. Therefore, it is urgent to establish a professional team to deal with the performance evaluation. In addition, because there is no unified, scientific and complete index system for the performance evaluation of the governments’ purchase for educational services, and the evaluating index systems of the different government departments, different regions are not same, it is hard to compare these evaluation results of different units. At the same time, it can not meet the requirements of all-round and comprehensive evaluation of different industries and different levels, which affects the authority and validity of the performance evaluation results of purchasing educational services by the government.

3. Experience and Enlightenment of Foreign governments’ Performance Evaluation of Purchasing Educational Services

3.1 Experience

The practice of purchasing educational services by foreign governments mainly focuses on solving the following two fundamental problems of education: (1) protect the equal right of vulnerable groups for education. Whether distributing special school vouchers or targeted personal allowances or subsidies, the generally targeted receivers are vulnerable groups such as children of poor families or exceptional students. By means of issuing school vouchers or providing subsidies, the governments help them to enjoy basic education services on an equal basis. (2) improve the quality of education and the efficiency of services. In order to improve the quality of public education and solve the problems of low efficiency and poor management of public schools, many

countries have adopted some ways to purchase educational services, such as charter schools, contract schools, entrustment management, school vouchers, etc..

3.2 Enlightenment

(1) Legislation first, perfect the guarantee system of law

The development of government purchase of service is closely related to the corresponding legal environment. The government should establish corresponding laws and regulations system for service purchase, guide the standardized development of government service purchase, strive to explore supervision and management mechanisms, establish detailed and auxiliary supervision and inspection mechanism, so as to realize the healthy development of government service purchase. When purchasing services, the governments at all levels should carry out strict annual supervision, annual inspection, set up administrative objectives, and clarify the key part of the administration; at the same time, it is necessary to carry out performance evaluation and the investigation of government credibility, set up reward and punishment standards, and combine inspection with rewards and punishments. Perfect laws and regulations can make the implementation of government's service purchase reasonable and reduce the costs caused by the lack of laws to a maximum extent. Only the Government purchase for educational services is based on a perfect legal framework, and ensuring the standardized operation of service purchasing by means of a set of comprehensive and effective legal system, the financial funds can be effectively utilized. Financial funds are taken from the people, should be used for the people, and widely supervised by the people.

(2) Pay attention to fairness and efficiency when government purchases education services

In the field of public service, fairness and efficiency can not be ignored. The traditional mode of public service provided by the government has the nature of monopoly, although it shows the nature of social fairness, but it is at the expense of reducing efficiency; at the same time, it lacks sustainability. On the other hand, if it overemphasizes efficiency, serious social injustice would be occurred. Therefore, public services provided by the government must constantly coordinate the relationship between fairness and efficiency. The government should not only improve the efficiency by market mechanism, but also ensure the basic supply of public services by the strength of the government, so as to realize the unity of fairness and efficiency.

(3) Clear responsibility and perfect contract clause

Government purchase of educational services should be based on educational applicability, relative costs and the benefits of the participation of private school. In order to improve the efficiency and social benefits of the educational services purchased by the government, good contract is not only the premise, but also must be effectively implemented.

4. Countermeasures and Suggestions for Improving the Performance of government's Purchase of Educational Services

(1) Issuing the guidance on the purchase of educational services by the government as soon as possible

Because the laws related to the purchase of educational services are not perfect and lag behind the development of reality, it is not difficult to imagine the serious lack of legal documents on the evaluation of government purchase of educational services in practical operation. The government's purchase of educational services has just started, and the foundation is still very weak. From aspect of educational purchase by the government, ideas need to be changed, policies need to be improved, mechanisms need to be improved, institutions need support and supervision needs to be strengthened.

(2) Constructing the performance evaluation system of Government's education Service purchase

Government purchase of educational services is a process in which multiple subjects participate, including government departments as investors and managers, social organizations as service implementers and suppliers, and the public as beneficiaries of services. The demands of different

participants for the educational services are often different from each other. Therefore, in the process of constructing the performance evaluation index of the government purchase of educational service, it is necessary to consider all the demands of the three different dimensions: government department, service supply organization and service receiver.

(3) Establishing the budget and financial management system of the Government's purchase of Educational Services

Government purchase of educational services is a contractual purchase which is paid totally or partly by the government finance, which must be guaranteed by the official finance so as to be realized smoothly. The purchase relies on the increasing of official financial investment, therefore, to improve the efficiency of the official financial investment, as it is respected, can lead to the best achievement. In order to ensure the government's purchase of educational services, a strict financial budget and financial management system should be established.

(4) Perfecting the evaluation process of purchasing educational services

In order to evaluate a case of educational service purchase, the overall development plan of society and the financial capacity of the government should be taken into account first. On this basis, the financial expenditure needed by the government to achieve this goal should be considered, and the economic benefits should be taken into account as well. At the same time, it is necessary to clarify the quantity and quality of the service and the specific contents of the services, which is an important part to be considered in the first step of the evaluation.

(5) Establishing a mechanism for the use of evaluation result

The government's evaluation result of the educational service purchase is not a dead letter, but of far-reaching significance. The evaluation result should not only avoid being shelved and forgotten, but also avoid being applied to acquire quick achievements. In many places, the evaluation results are only formalized results after the evaluation, which is not the basis of re-cooperation, nor does it have anything to do with the funds for educational service purchase. At present, the use of evaluation results in China is mainly related to the material awards. If the undertaker's performance meet the evaluation criteria, there will be a certain material reward. Only the evaluation criteria is being met, rewards as a bonus or as a basis for payment of funds in the contract could be acquired by the undertaker of the purchase. At the same time, the application of the evaluation results can promote the government to establish the risk prevention mechanism, and the evaluation results can make the government optimize their service functions and provide better public services. Similarly, the purchase process can be more scientific and perfect, which has a profound impact on the establishment of the evaluation system of purchasing education services in China.

(6) Giving full play to the role of third-party evaluation institutions

As the purchaser of public service, in the process of evaluating the performance of public service purchase, as mentioned above, the common practical method is that the higher government evaluates the performance of the service purchase organized by its lower government department, there is inevitably interest connection between the upper and the lower; in addition, the evaluation result is easy to be affected by the official will, so it will inevitably affect the objectivity and authenticity of the evaluation in practice. What's more, taking the powerful credibility crisis in recent years for account, it seems inevitable to play the role of third-party evaluation institutions.

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