

# Comparison and Suggestions on the Assessment Methods for Master's Entrance

Yi Liang \*

Department of IHEM, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China

\* Corresponding Author Email: yiliang@ln.hk

**Abstract.** In recent years, with the rapid development of the world economy, the demand for talents around the world is also increasing, so people's willingness to receive higher education is becoming stronger. At the same time, people's spiritual lives are becoming increasingly rich; what people pursue is not only material satisfaction but also spiritual satisfaction. Therefore, taking postgraduate studies has gradually become a trend. By using the comparative analysis method, this article introduces the definition of both the master's entrance examination admission application system and the postgraduate admission assessment system and analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of these two exam methods using China and the United States as examples. After making the comparison of these two systems, some reasonable suggestions are proposed for the current assessment system in order to make the examination system work more effectively and meet the needs of current society.

**Keywords:** Assessment system; application system; suggestion.

## 1. Introduction

Currently, in China, under the trend of society's increasing demand for talents' academic qualifications, more and more graduates choose to continue their studies and take the postgraduate entrance examination. According to the statistics, in 2022, the number of applicants for master's degree programs nationwide reached 4.57 million, an increase of 800000 or 21% compared to 2021 [1]. As the number of applicants' increases, but the admission quota remains unchanged, the pressure caused by the postgraduate entrance examination also increases for students, and those students choose another way to continue their studies - Study abroad. The number of people studying abroad in China has grown rapidly since the 21st century, from 39000 in 2000 to 703500 in 2019, an increase of 17 times. The fastest growth rates were observed in 2001-2002 and 2008-2012, and the growth rate in 2019 was up to 6.25% [2].

The current entrance examination system for master's degrees is usually divided into an assessment system and an application system. However, the research volume on these two systems is relatively moderate, and the existing research direction mainly focuses on exploring the development of the doctoral entrance examination system and the application system, as well as the direction of reform and practice rather than the postgraduate entrance examination. Other studies focus on the two specific countries to analyze these two types of entrance examination systems, including their history, influence, differences, and future development, for example, America and China. From the current research trend, the selection of master's degrees receives limited attention, and effective perspectives on the assessment system are notably absent. However, the increasing number of Master's applicants underscores the significant potential and value inherent in related research.

Based on existing research, this article will explain the definitions and applicable regions of the assessment system and the application systems, the reasons for the differences between these two exam systems, analyze the advantages and disadvantages of these two assessment methods, and evaluate their respective impacts. Apart from this, suggestions will be given for China's current postgraduate entrance examination system to improve the efficiency of selection.

## 2. Key Definitions

### 2.1. The Graduate Admission Application System for Master's Degree

The master entrance examination admission application system is usually divided into the following three steps. Firstly, applicants should prepare their own materials for applying for relevant degree majors and send application materials to the universities they want to apply. Secondly, applicants who pass the application materials may need to participate in the interview assessment organized by the school. Thirdly, the school will evaluate and decide whether to accept applicants based on their performance and overall comprehensive quality. The requirements for applicants' application conditions can be summarized into five aspects: educational requirements, English, professional or scientific research, course scores, and standardized exam scores. There are many countries that have adopted the master's degree application system for admission, like America, England, Australia, Canada, and Singapore. Taking American universities as an example, the United States requires applicants to obtain a bachelor's (or higher) degree before enrollment, and the educational requirements are relatively lenient. Harvard University requires applicants to hold a bachelor's degree, but undergraduate students in their senior year are also welcome to apply. In terms of English, applicants are required to provide valid proof of English proficiency, such as TOEFL, IELTS, and PTE. For example, the University of Florida requires applicants to be proficient in both spoken and written English and to undergo English tests conducted by the Michigan English Language Assessment Panel (MELAB) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), with the results being used as the results of the Foreign Language Test (TOEFL). In terms of majors or scientific research, some universities in the United States require applicants to have a certain foundation of professional knowledge in the applied subject. Harvard University's philosophy program requires applicants to have a solid undergraduate philosophical background, indicating that those applicants have a good foundation in philosophical history knowledge. For course grades, American universities have different requirements for applicants' undergraduate GPA, such as the University of California, Berkeley requiring applicants to have a GPA of no less than 3.0 (B), and the California Institute of Technology does not have a minimum GPA requirement, but most students have a GPA of 3.5 or higher [3]. In general, the top 20 schools require a GPA of no less than 3.8, and the top 40 schools require a GPA of no less than 3.5.

### 2.2. The Postgraduate Admission Assessment System for Master's Degree

The postgraduate admission assessment system can also be divided into three steps. Firstly, candidates review based on the exam content provided by the school they want to apply for. Secondly, participate in a unified postgraduate entrance examination. Thirdly, an interview will be given based on the written test results, and then finally, wait for the interview results. Take China's postgraduate admission assessment system as an instance. China requires applicants to obtain a bachelor's degree before enrollment, and some schools may have requirements for English single-subject grades and CET-4 and CET-6 scores. Some universities in China have restrictions on the majors for master's programs, research fields, number of articles published during undergraduate studies, and quantity of applicants during the bachelor's degree. For example, the Marxist Theory major at Shanghai Jiao Tong University clearly requires applicants to have a strong academic research interest, strong scientific research ability, and have written important research reports or published papers in public [3]. In addition to adopting this master's entrance examination system for enrollment in China, Russia and France also adopted a unified assessment system for enrollment.

### **3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Graduate Application Admission for Master's Degree.**

#### **3.1. Merits of Master's Application System**

The application system and the assessment system have their own advantages and disadvantages in the selection process. These two assessment systems essentially require candidates' English grades, and there is also an interview process to demonstrate candidates' abilities.

Applicants who apply for a master's degree under the application system have a considerable degree of freedom. After obtaining exam results, applicants can apply to multiple enrollment units according to their specific situation and are likely to be admitted by different enrollment units at the same time. Applicants can choose their destination completely according to their preferences. In this way, not only are students competing for good schools, but schools are also looking for good students so those schools can most effectively recruit the most suitable talents [4].

At the same time, language examinations such as TOEFL and IELTS are held multiple times every year so that applicants can choose the most suitable time to participate in the exam, which provides great convenience for them. In addition, the application process for admission under the application system is not based on a single score to determine admission qualifications. Although a GRE score is one of the necessary conditions for students to apply for postgraduate study, it is not the only requirement, and most schools do not have any requirements for scores. For example, Duke University, most of its graduate programs adopt a GRE optional policy. If applicants feel that a GRE score can increase their competitiveness, they can choose to submit, but it is not a mandatory requirement. In addition, the entire engineering school of the school has GRE optional policies, such as biomedical engineering, electrical and computer engineering, mechanical engineering, materials science and engineering, and financial technology. Some master's programs related to be have announced that they will never require submission of GRE scores.

When applying for graduate studies at universities, candidates should provide the following materials: firstly, the candidate's overall course scores during their undergraduate studies; secondly, the GRE score; thirdly, two or three recommendation letters signed by professors should objectively evaluate students' academic level, workability, and ability to engage in scientific research; fourthly candidate should indicate the purpose of applying for this major, learning plan, and sometimes provide corresponding work experience. The full name of the GRE is the Graduate Record Examination. The GRE exam consists of three major items: analytical writing, mathematics, and language ability. These three exams all examine students' basic abilities and lay the foundation for their future studies. Helping students find a good position is a responsible assessment system for both the school and students [5]. From this, it can be seen that the application-based admission system places more emphasis on the comprehensive qualities of applicants rather than a single subject's learning ability.

#### **3.2. Drawbacks of Master's Application System**

However, the drawbacks of applying for admission are also obvious. Due to the different criteria that can be used to evaluate applicants, it is difficult to have a precise measurement method, and therefore, there may be a series of subjective factors for examiners in the selection process. Many applicants use this assessment loophole to unrealistic beautify their academic background and even resort to other means of deception, which may breed cheating and educational corruption and is not conducive to educational fairness.

For example, in 2019, the media exposed the largest admissions fraud in the history of American universities. A company named The Key in the United States is suspected of academic crimes. The CEO of the company, William Singh, established a non-profit organization called the Key Global Foundation and used it as a cover for bribery. By colluding with college sports coaches and exam managers, he secretly helped "clients's" children cheat in college entrance exams. Moreover, in recent years, the number of graduate students applying in the United States has increased sharply, and the

competition is exceptionally fierce. In this context, some applicants are willing to use various means to improve their competitiveness, including forging recommendation letters. Recommendation letters play a very important role in graduate application, as they are an important indicator for evaluating applicants. Forgery of recommendation letters will reduce the fairness of the review process, damaging the reputation of applicants and recommenders, wasting reviewers' time and resources, and affecting the opportunities of other applicants.

Additionally, these schools that adopt the application system for admission place more emphasis on the development of students' comprehensive qualities and personal experiences, which may overlook their subject learning abilities. For instance, the GRE exam does not measure professional courses or knowledge, and the TOEFL and IELTS also examine language proficiency.

## **4. Advantages and Disadvantages of Graduate Assessment Admission System for Master's Degree**

### **4.1. Merits of Master's Assessment System**

Taking the entrance examination for a Chinese master's degree as an example, the exam subjects are political theory, foreign language, and two professional subject courses. Some majors include mathematics or comprehensive foundations. Professional subject courses include basic courses and specialized foundational courses. In order to facilitate the selection of candidates, a portion of the test questions should be used to test the depth and mastery of the course, as well as the ability to flexibly apply the knowledge learned to solve practical problems [6]. Undoubtedly, this selection process tests the candidate's knowledge reserve, which, to some extent, ensures the quality of the student source.

Besides, this highly unified admission method largely implements the concept of educational fairness. The graduate assessment system for master's degrees is composed of national unified propositions, unified exams, and a unified minimum admission scoreline. After setting the score line, the admission unit will determine the number of candidates for the reexamination. Finally, based on the comprehensive situation of the candidates' initial reexamination, and after conducting a final political review of the candidates, the admission list will be determined and publicly displayed on the school's official website. Finally, the admission notice will be issued [1]. This highly centralized and unified examination model promotes open and transparent admission, which is conducive to educational fairness.

### **4.2. Shortcomings of Master's Assessment System**

The higher education management system of assessment-based enrollment has the characteristic of "centralization". Taking China as an example, the government pay more attention to higher education through laws, grants, administrative orders, and other means. The management of master's and graduate students adopts a three-level management model: the first level is the Ministry of Education, the second level is the provincial competent departments, and the third level is the graduate enrollment units. The entire enrollment examination process, including formulating enrollment plans, stipulating admission conditions, determining exam time and content, and setting the minimum admission score line, is the direct responsibility of the education administration department. This management model has certain advantages in the rational allocation of educational resources, but it is not conducive to unleashing the enthusiasm and initiative of enrollment units [7].

Secondly, the exam content makes it difficult to assess students' research potential and comprehensive quality. Factors that affect graduate development include "professional knowledge," "reasoning ability," "learning motivation," "communication ability," "creativity," "economic conditions," "characteristics of graduate learning experience," and "family environment," among others [8]. Overall, the master's entrance examination has the characteristic of "exam-oriented education". Many candidates pass the preliminary examination by rote memorization, and the exam results cannot truly reflect the candidate's scientific research potential and comprehensive quality.

Although the supervisor attach importance to students' research abilities during the interview process, students focused their energy on preparing for the exam during their undergraduate studies and neglected their research experience.

Thirdly, regarding the postgraduate entrance examination in China, it seriously impacts undergraduate education. Because the postgraduate entrance examination is scheduled for January, students preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination have devoted all their energy to the several subjects they need to take throughout the first semester of their senior year. They often skip classes and even come to class to review the postgraduate entrance examination materials, abandoning their undergraduate studies. The convergence of master's candidates towards the college entrance examination has seriously affected the learning of undergraduate courses [1]. After the written exam, there is an interview, which is usually from March to April each year, and is also the stage of preparing for the undergraduate thesis. During the second round of the exam, there was a conflict between the time for writing the graduation thesis and the master's interview assessment, and thus, the candidates did not take the graduation thesis and internship seriously at all.

## **5. The Enlightenment of the Master's Application System in China**

To select students with strong comprehensive abilities in graduate enrollment, it is necessary to combine multiple assessment methods, not only implement a single enrollment method but also make reasonable use of the advantages of the application system. Not only should the related institutions learn from the excellent experience of foreign universities, but also adopt practical assessment methods based on the characteristics of domestic education.

### **5.1. Adopting a Combination of Assessment and Application Systems**

The way to enroll postgraduates is not only through assessment systems but also through application systems as a parallel channel, which will reduce the phenomenon of "score-oriented".

Due to the potential unfairness of the application system, when implementing the "application-assessment" system, universities should improve relevant supervision mechanisms. As analyzed earlier, the application system is prone to educational inequality due to the lack of unified measurement standards, while the assessment system has a unified standard. Therefore, to some extent, the simultaneous enrollment of both methods is conducive to curbing the occurrence of educational inequality. During the trial process, if any disciplinary violations are reported, each university should take them seriously, promptly verify them, and publicize them. For disciplinary candidates, their grades will be directly cancelled, their eligibility for application will be restricted, and the supervisors involved will also be subject to corresponding penalties. At the same time, the application and assessment process should be transparent and open through both online and offline channels. Secondly, specialized appeal platforms for candidates should be established within each university. If candidates have objections to the review, assessment, and admission procedures during the recruitment process or are unfairly treated during the assessment stage, they can request academic arbitration through an appealing platform or even file an administrative lawsuit with the court. Candidates who have objections to the assessment results after the recruitment process can also request a re-verification of their scores through the appeal platform. Thirdly, establish an independent external supervision agency for education administration, correct unfair enrollment and asymmetric rights and responsibilities in universities, and thus avoid negative phenomena such as lack of internal supervision in universities [3].

### **5.2. Add Comprehensive Ability Exam Subjects**

In response to the difficulty in evaluating the comprehensive abilities of students recruited in the assessment system, comprehensive examination subjects can be added to the existing assessment subjects, which is conducive to reflecting the comprehensiveness and rationality of the examination content. Regarding how to set examination conditions and assess, it is necessary to consider the source

of students in the subject and major, as well as the subject to develop a series of scientific, rigorous, and feasible plans based on their characteristics and implement them after repeated discussion and argumentation[9].

The comprehensive ability exam can draw inspiration from the GRE and general test exams in the United States. The method is to establish a specialized graduate admission qualification examination center by the education regulatory department. The main content of the exam is to assess the comprehensive abilities of candidates, including conducting tests on their native language expression ability, mathematical foundation ability, and logical reasoning ability. The admission scoreline is determined by each enrollment unit, and passing it can qualify for admission to master's or doctoral students. The comprehensive ability exam can be held twice a year, once in spring and once in autumn, and the validity period of the scores can be from three to five years [4]. This not only assesses subject knowledge but also focuses on examining candidates' ability to analyze problems, think critically, and express themselves in writing.

### 5.3. Be Conducive to Promote Undergraduate Teaching

China does not take into account the undergraduate studies of candidates when admitting postgraduate students, resulting in a complete disconnect between the undergraduate and graduate stages, leading to incomplete mastery of the knowledge learned during the undergraduate stage. According to the survey results, it is shown that the graduate supervisor.

The selection ratio of knowledge and skills that students pursuing a master's degree should possess, from high to low, is as follows: professional basic knowledge (95.80%), innovation ability (80.57%), language expression ability (72.79%), foreign language application ability (70.80%), hands-on operation ability (66.34%), reading comprehension ability (65.95%), reasoning ability (56.85%), mathematical operation ability (42.31%), and ideological and political quality (38.52%), Spatial perception ability (15.11%) [10]. From these data, it can be seen that mentors attach great importance to professional basic knowledge.

Therefore, the postgraduate entrance examination in China can be advanced to October or November, or there can be two qualification examination opportunities per year. The Ministry of Education shall establish corresponding qualification score lines and issue qualification certificates. Candidates who meet the score line can apply for and participate in professional course exams at various universities, and their scores are valid for two years. This is beneficial for candidates to allocate more time and energy to their studies without too much impact on undergraduate course learning and scientific research.

## 6. Conclusion

This article is based on the definition and explanation of the master's application system and the assessment system and analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of these two enrollment methods. Taking the United States and China as examples, it proposes reform suggestions for the master's assessment system in order to recruit talents more efficiently and better develop higher education.

The master's application system is a two-way choice between students and schools. There are many methods to measure students' abilities and attach importance to their comprehensive quality and abilities. However, the lack of unified standards for measuring methods can easily lead to academic cheating. On the contrary, the master's assessment system has a unified entrance examination, which is conducive to educational fairness and ensures the quality of students. However, this unified exam not only conflicts with undergraduate education but also hinders the development of students' scientific research abilities in terms of exam schedules and exam content.

By comparing these two systems, this article analyses deeply the master's evaluation system in order to better meet the needs of higher education today. For example, developing this system can help promote undergraduate learning and add some comprehensive ability exam subjects. With those changes, the assessment system will create better and more reasonable conditions and standards for

students, which will help attract international students and promote the internationalization of higher education.

The limitations of this article lie in the lack of objective first-hand data on research materials and a deeper understanding of the examination related to the application system, such as the GRE. Based on this, more emphasis will be paid to first-hand data in the future research.

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