

Research on the countermeasures for the construction of general education courses in local ordinary colleges and universities in the new era

Yan ZENG

Academic Affairs Office, Chongqing Technology and Business University, Chongqing 400000, China

Abstract: General education is an important part of higher education. Under the guidance of the "Four Returns", "Four-sphere Confidence" and "Four Insistence" in the new era, the construction of general education in China has developed rapidly, but at the same time, it also faces problems such as low quality of curriculum construction and insufficient degree of curriculum laddering. It is necessary to improve the quality of simultaneous course construction by establishing specialized management institutions, paying attention to the construction of course content, and promoting team teaching.

Key words: general education; curriculum quality; construction

1 The origin and development of general education

General education originated in ancient Greece, developed rapidly in medieval Europe, and gradually became the mainstream of higher education in Western countries. At the end of the 19th century, the liberal education trend emerged in the United States. A series of reform plans with general education as the core concept deeply reflected and criticized the knowledge system of traditional universities, prompting the reform of specialized education in universities. In the late 1970s, general education made a breakthrough progress in European and American countries. Since entering the 21st century, with the advent of the era of popularization, diversification and personalization of higher education, general education has attracted more and more attention from countries around the world.

The development of general education and the curriculum of general education in China began simultaneously with the resumption of the college entrance examination. Since the resumption of the college entrance examination in 1978, the undergraduate curriculum system of China's colleges and universities has gone through three stages of development: first, in the early stage of reform and opening up, the undergraduate curriculum was divided into two parts: professional basic courses and professional courses; in the mid-to-late 90s of the 20th century, the Ministry of Education clearly proposed the promotion of quality education, and the undergraduate curriculum was composed of public basic courses, professional basic courses and professional courses. Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the further integration of Western general education concepts and the development of higher education in China, the curriculum of colleges and universities has presented the setting mode of general education courses, professional basic courses and professional courses [1].

2 The logical basis of general education in China's colleges and universities in the new era

2.1 The Four Returns are an inevitable requirement for the development of general education

The Four Returns are the topics of the times faced by China's higher education after the entry of socialism with Chinese characteristics. As an educational concept that pursues the all-round development of people, general education emphasizes the cultivation of the humanistic spirit, which is in line with the core values of socialism in terms of concept and value orientation. General education emphasizes "all-round human development" and cultivates "new people of the era who can shoulder the great task of national rejuvenation", which is essentially consistent with President Xi Jinping's important statements such as "Three Strivings", "Four Perseverances" and "Five Contemporary China". Based on this, the Four Returns are the inevitable requirements for the construction and development of general education in Chinese colleges and universities in the new era, which points out the direction and path of the construction and development of general education in the new era. In the process of promoting the construction of general education, bold exploration should be carried out in general curriculum settings, teaching methods and ways, etc., so as to comprehensively improve the quality of talent training.

At present, the general education curriculum of colleges and universities in China is mainly based on the training mode of majors, and a relatively complete curriculum system has been constructed. However, from the perspective of training objectives, curriculum content and teaching methods, there are still problems such as knowledge-based and test-oriented orientation to a certain extent. Therefore, the construction of general education courses should be carried out from the aspects of returning to the essence of education, returning to the needs of human development, and returning to the laws of teaching.

2.2 The Four-sphere Confidence are the inexhaustible driving force for the construction of general education courses

President Xi Jinping pointed out that "strengthening cultural self-confidence is a more fundamental, broader and deeper self-confidence" [2]. As an important position for cultural dissemination, colleges and universities shoulder the important task of inheriting the excellent traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, in the process of promoting the construction of general education courses, colleges and universities should follow the Four-sphere Confidence as the fundamental principle and cultivate the self-confidence of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics. Teachers of general education courses in colleges and universities should deeply understand that cultural self-confidence is an important part of the construction of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics and an important foundation for the cultivation of talents in colleges and universities. College teachers should fully tap the excellent connotations of traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, and make good use of the classroom as the main front to educate and guide students. At the same time, in the course teaching, the Four-sphere Confidence should be organically integrated into the teaching content and teaching activities, and the Four-sphere Confidence should be implemented in the construction of general education courses [3].

2.3 The Four Insistence are the fundamental principles for the construction of general education courses

As an important form of general education, general education courses are in full swing in Chinese universities in the new era. However, due to the lack of theoretical research on general education and the lack of systematic understanding of the connotation of general education courses, many problems are often manifested in practice, such as the lack of systematization of curriculum design, the lack of depth of course content, the lack of responsibility of teachers in teaching, and the lack of consciousness of students in learning. The core of general education reform is to change the current status of general education course construction in colleges and universities and promote the transformation of general education course construction in Chinese colleges and universities into connotative development in the new era. In August 2019,

President Xi Jinping stressed at the National Education Conference that "it is necessary to deepen the reform of the education system, improve the implementation mechanism of cultivating people with virtue, reverse the unscientific orientation of education evaluation, and resolutely overcome the stubborn disease of only scores, only further education, only diplomas, only papers, and only academic hats." Four Insistence is an important requirement put forward by President Xi Jinping at the National Education Conference for the construction of general education courses in Chinese colleges and universities in the new era, and has important guiding significance for promoting the construction of general education courses in Chinese colleges and universities in the new era.

3 Case analysis

A certain university is a local institution that mainly majors in finance and economics. At present, there are 140 general elective courses in the curriculum database of the university, including 29 online courses and 111 offline courses.

The overall operation data of the school's general education courses from 2019 to 2022 are shown in Table 1. The school offers more than 40 general education courses every academic year, 70% of which are online courses, and 30% of which are offered offline by their teachers. From 2019 to 2021, there are 28 online general elective courses, including 11 online courses self-created by on-campus teachers and 17 off-campus purchased courses. From 2021 to 2023, there were 21-23 online general elective courses. The number of students choosing online courses is much higher than that of offline courses.

Table 1: 2019-2022 general education course offering and course enrollment numbers

| Semester | Online courses (number) | | Online courses (number) | Offline courses (number) | Total number of courses offered | Number of online course enrollments | Number of offline courses enrollments | Total number of course attendees |
|-------------|-------------------------|---------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | On-campus | Outside | | | | | | |
| 2019-2020-2 | 11 | 17 | 28 | 14 | 41 | 12805 | 2753 | 15558 |
| 2020-2021-1 | 11 | 17 | 28 | 8 | 38 | 12049 | 844 | 12893 |
| 2020-2021-2 | 11 | 17 | 28 | 12 | 40 | 10378 | 2225 | 12603 |
| 2021-2022-1 | 11 | 17 | 28 | 10 | 42 | 11340 | 1375 | 12715 |
| 2021-2022-2 | 6 | 17 | 23 | 7 | 30 | 9562 | 1955 | 11517 |
| 2022-2023-1 | 6 | 16 | 22 | 10 | 32 | 11403 | 1409 | 12812 |
| 2022-2023-2 | 4 | 17 | 21 | 7 | 29 | 10620 | 1371 | 11991 |

Table 2: Number of students enrolled in offline general education elective courses from 2019 to 2022

| Serial number | Course name | 2019-2020-2 | 2020-2021-1 | 2020-2021-2 | 2021-2022-1 | 2021-2022-2 | 2022-2023-1 | 2022-2023-2 |
|---------------|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | Popular Music** | 100 | 98 | 40 | | | | 84 |
| 2 | Musical Arts** | 99 | | | | | | |
| 3 | Tea Culture** | 90 | 74 | | | | 57 | 56 |
| 4 | General Theory of Management** | 200 | | 100 | 91 | 99 | 54 | |
| 5 | Entrepreneurship** | 100 | | 160 | 153 | 112 | 241 | |
| 6 | Selected Readings of Literary Classics** | 438 | 150 | 501 | 145 | 407 | 159 | 337 |

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|----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 7 | Guide to the Classics of Chinese Culture** | 341 | | 170 | | 139 | | 75 |
| 8 | Chinese Folk Festivals** | 75 | | | | | | |
| 9 | General Theory of Jurisprudence** | 101 | | | | | | |
| 10 | Introduction to Life Sciences** | 600 | 95 | 696 | 307 | 663 | 171 | 600 |
| 11 | Chemistry and Society** | 277 | | 273 | 99 | 300 | 253 | |
| 12 | Human Society and Biological Invasions | 56 | | | | | | |
| 13 | PowerPoint Design & Production Practical Techniques** | 87 | | | | | | |
| 14 | Women's Health** | 89 | | | | | | |
| 15 | Communicative Etiquette** | | 95 | | | | | |
| 16 | Startup Finance** | | 184 | | 80 | 44 | 197 | |
| 17 | Cinematic Art Appreciation** | | 84 | 36 | 41 | | 53 | 170 |
| 18 | Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era | | 64 | | | | | |
| 19 | General Theory of Economics** | | | 100 | 52 | | | |
| 20 | Appreciation of Classic Romance Movies | | | 40 | | | | |
| 21 | Basic Korean** | | | 46 | 47 | | | 49 |
| 22 | Introduction to the "Four Histories"*** | | | | 89 | | 100 | |
| 23 | General Theory of Sociology** | | | | | | 60 | |

Judging from the course opening situation in the past three years, the following changes have been shown: 1) Course offering situation: Due to the impact of the epidemic, the convenience of online learning and other factors, the number of online courses offered by the school is far greater than the number of offline courses, and in the past 7 semesters, the number of online courses is 2-3 times that of offline courses. 2) The trend of the number of course selections: the number of online course selections is much higher than the number of offline course selections. Especially after the epidemic in 2020, the number of online course applicants is much higher than the number of offline course candidates. In the past 7 semesters, the number of online course applicants has remained stable at about 10,000, the average number of offline course applicants is about 1,300, and the number of online course applicants is 10 times that of offline course applicants. 3) Course content attributes: Most of the online courses belong to humanities and social sciences, such as Aesthetic Art and Communication Skill Improvement, while the offline courses are compatible with humanities and technology, including humanities courses such as Introduction to Chinese Classics and scientific literacy courses such as Introduction to Life Sciences. 4) Course teaching team: Online courses are recorded and broadcast, produced once and reused countless times. The course teaching team has one teacher teaching from the beginning to the end, and there is also team teaching in chapters; offline courses are mostly taught by one teacher, and only 2-3 courses are taught by the course team.

3.1 Problems exist

(1) Course offerings lack breadth

The setting of general education courses must be guided by general education concepts. Different concepts will form different combinations of curriculum settings. On the one hand, the school has the problem of outdated general education concepts. It believes that all non-professional courses can be used as general courses and incorporates ideological and political courses, English courses, computer courses, etc. into the general education system. Not only does it appear diverse in terms of name settings, the classification has also become disorganized, so that some subject-based and specialized courses have become part of the required general education courses. On the other hand, although the school emphasizes the importance of general education, the teaching in practice is very random, and at the same time it highlights the respect for professional learning. The main reason is that the understanding of the concept of general education is not deep enough, and general education is considered as a dispensable education in addition to professional education, or an accessory to professional education. These misunderstandings are one of the important reasons for the low quality of general education courses. Schools should form a basic understanding of general education, increase the emphasis on general education, and integrate school-specific elements into the curriculum content design, so as to make the curriculum different for each school and promote the formation of a general education system with distinctive characteristics of the school.

(2) The curriculum is not deep

The existing professional curriculum system can design gradient courses according to the principle of step-by-step and in line with the internal logical changes of knowledge and changes in learners' cognitive structures. In the general course system, almost all colleges and universities have certain restrictions on students' course selection, such as requiring at least 2 credits or at least one course in each type of course, or placing restrictions on specific types of courses to ensure the breadth of study. However, from the perspective of module distribution form, most of them are flat distribution with knowledge content as the dividing standard. The curriculum design within and between modules lacks gradient changes, and the depth of knowledge and cognitive development lack interaction. Especially regarding the vertical gradient within the course, there is a lack of organized design based on chronological order, difficulty level of knowledge, changes in learners' minds, etc. On the one hand, this kind of module setting is easy to cause the phenomenon of course platter, and the coherence between courses is difficult to guarantee; on the other hand, it is not conducive to promoting the development of students' cognitive ability, and students may choose courses easily and lack rationality.

The reasons are: first, the education and teaching ideas cannot be completely consistent with the development of the times, market orientation, and students' needs. The transformation of educational and teaching ideas lags behind the development of needs. Second, the update of teaching content is not timely, and there is still the phenomenon of "one lesson plan teaching for a lifetime", which is not enough for the optimization, replacement and improvement of teaching content; third, the teaching technology and teaching methods are backward, and many teachers of general education courses still use the traditional single "lecturing" method, which is difficult to attract the interest of students in the new era.

4 Countermeasures proposed

4.1 Optimizing management

It is necessary to establish a special agency to manage the general education work department, revise and improve the existing management system and management methods for general education courses, and specifically discuss the arrangement of curriculum settings, instead of a single college or individual teacher arbitrarily choosing a course as a general education course, resulting in some courses deviating from the goal of general education. According to the needs of society, it is necessary to timely conduct surveys on teachers, students, and people inside and outside the school on the

setting and implementation of general education courses, focus on their suggestions, and make adjustments to general education courses.

4.2 Optimizing curriculum

Focusing on the school's guiding ideology of general education, it is necessary to coordinate curriculum construction and improve curriculum quality. Focusing on the school's own characteristics, it is necessary to discover and establish a number of school-based characteristic general education courses, encourage well-known professors or outstanding teachers to serve as general education course lecturers, and expand the recognition of the value of general education courses by teachers and students throughout the school.

4.3 Strengthening teacher construction

Team teaching should be actively encouraged. In terms of teacher construction, it is necessary to pay attention to inter-school complementarity, subject knowledge complementarity, and age structure complementarity, make full use of virtual teaching and research departments, jointly carry out curriculum construction, teaching and research, jointly formulate curriculum systems, and construct curriculum content.

4.4 Balancing the relationship

It is necessary to balance the relationship between online courses of general courses and school-based self-developed courses. As the pace of education reform accelerates, general education courses that still use traditional teaching models will not be able to meet students' learning needs, and it will be even more difficult to adapt to the requirements of the development of the times. Therefore, general education courses should be based on online platforms, carry out teaching activities in students' favorite ways, stimulate students' learning interest, enthusiasm and initiative, promote innovation in curriculum models, and improve teaching effectiveness. In the general elective course module, teaching credits for online courses and offline courses can be set to increase the enrollment rate of offline courses and balance the relationship between offline and online courses. Offline courses can also put part of the course content on the online platform, and through correct guidance, the teaching model of offline teaching and online tutoring can be applied.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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About the author

Zeng Yan, Female, Associate Researcher, Academic Affairs Office, Chongqing Technology and Business University.