

Comparison of the Implementation of Course Education in Chinese and American Universities

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Abstract. This thesis compares the differences in teaching objectives and developing modes between Chinese and American university courses, the autonomy of students and the classroom interaction in both countries, as well as different assessment methods for students' learning results, thus reflecting the implementation of course education in Chinese and American universities under the influence of different social and cultural background. The aim is to serve as a reference for the improvement of university curriculum setting and specific teaching in China via the comparison of the implementation of course education. With the rapid development of science and technology as well as the increasing demand and renewal of knowledge, since the 1980s, China and the United States have carried out a ceaseless round of reforms from preschool education to higher education according to their national circumstances, cultural traditions and social demands. Among them, as the intermediate bridge for students from learning stage to social life, college students' education has always been the focus of the two countries. Especially after entering the 21st century, this thesis attempts to compare the university curriculum teaching objective, mode, autonomy and interactivity of students in the process of education of in Chinese and American universities, as well as their evaluation of performance, hoping to help the teachers deepen their awareness of China's higher education and find out the effectiveness and shortcomings of China's higher education model, thus promoting the further optimization and development of higher education in China.

Keywords: Sino-US education; course education.

1. Comparison of Teaching Objective Setting in Chinese and American Universities

According to Taylor, "if we study a course systematically and rationally, we must first determine the various educational objectives to be achieved." [1] Similarly, teachers also need to set corresponding teaching objectives in the process of teaching courses. As a systematic manifestation of teaching objectives, teaching syllabus makes teaching planning explicit, teaching objectives clear and teaching contents elaborate. The syllabus not only enables teachers to benefit from this in the daily teaching process, but also effectively links teachers' "teaching" with students' "learning" in the teaching process, which plays a pivotal /crucial role in promoting students' learning effects.

Both Chinese and American colleges and universities use syllabus in their courses, but there exist great differences in each implementation process. Take the summer literature course of University of Pennsylvania and English major literature course of some college in China as examples. The University of Pennsylvania uploads the syllabus on the corresponding course page through the student course system before the course begins. According to the time sequence, the syllabus not only specifies the teaching content of each class every week in detail, but also clearly plans and assigns the pre-class reading and after-class homework that students need to finish for each class. At the same time, students can clearly understand their learning requirements for each class and each time point by reading the syllabus. By contrast, English major literature course of one university in China has a clear plan for weekly teaching, but it lacks the specific application in the actual curriculum compared with American universities. Not only the teaching content in the syllabus is relevantly vague, but the practical teaching often does not follow the syllabus. Because of the existence of the teaching syllabus is more in name than in reality, it also affects actual teaching effects.

Although teaching is a flexible and elastic process, the syllabus should perform as a relatively rigid standard. The formulation and strict implementation of the teaching syllabus allow teachers to clearly

understand their teaching tasks and objectives before the practical teaching, making the teaching process more purposeful, and students are more oriented in the learning process. Therefore, with the progress of the curriculum, teaching closely with the syllabus is an effective means to help teachers and students to achieve their phased goals in an orderly manner. On the contrary, weakening the role of teaching syllabus in practical teaching will give teachers much freedom in the teaching process. Besides, due to the fact that the requirements on students are not strict enough, it is easy to cause the students to be inattentive in class, have nothing to do after class, and learn without goals and motivation.

The syllabus not only has the function of goal determination and teaching guidance before the start of the course, but also plays an important role in teachers' teaching process and students' learning process. Compared with American colleges and universities, Chinese colleges and universities value less on the syllabus. Especially in the follow-up learning process, it is more likely to bring out a phenomenon that the syllabus is derailed from the practical teaching. Therefore, rebuilding the programmatic status of the syllabus in Chinese higher education will effectively promote the optimization of Chinese higher education.

2. Comparison of Teaching Modes between Chinese and American Colleges and Universities

Dong Hailin (2008) proposes that in order to understand a country's education, it is necessary to first study the various factors affecting the country's education system, especially cultural factors [2]. The different cultural background of each country forms its different national values, which also affects the mode of thinking and concept of people in different countries. As the world's largest immigrant country and one typical individualistic country, the United States shows a high degree of tolerance to multiculturalism and freedom in individual behaviors. Similarly, as Dewey, the founder of American pedagogy, said, "Social civilization and all the achievements of the society come from individual participation" [3]. Similarly, the biggest difference between Chinese and American college and university teaching modes lies in the proportion of students' individual performance and course education participation. That is, the proportion that students are required to express their own ideas and show their self-learning outcomes in class.

Classroom teaching in Chinese colleges and universities is mainly dominated by teachers' teaching, while American colleges and universities tend to emphasize the participation of students. The traditional teaching method in China is beneficial for students to acquire the knowledge that they need to master in the shortest time and in the fastest way, but this process of passively accepting knowledge greatly weakens the cultivation of students' ability of "self-exploration and discovery. In contrast, the classroom teaching of American colleges and universities pays more attention to students' thinking training, and teachers' teaching methods tend to be more abundant and diversified. American teachers use the same traditional teaching methods as Chinese teachers, but they also use free discussion, team debate, report presentation, social research and other teaching methods. Before each class, American teachers usually review the content of the previous class before starting a new class. Such teaching method helps students better transfer from the old knowledge they have learned to the new knowledge they are going to learn. In addition, students are encouraged to actively participate in class discussions and they can raise their hands to ask questions at any time in class. Therefore, any doubts and questions students encounter can be solved in time in class. Such teaching mode is conducive to the students who ask questions to continue learning smoothly after the problem is solved. In addition, during the process from question raising to problem solving, the rest of students in the class also exercise their ability to think independently, judge, analyze and solve problems. Therefore, the differences between the teaching modes in Chinese and American colleges and universities show the different positions of "teaching" and "learning" in the two countries, namely "the studying method of American school education takes the initiative, while the teaching method of Chinese school education takes an advantageous position." [4]

Due to its large population and huge pressure of entering higher education, China's education system focuses more on the infusion of students' knowledge, which enables Chinese students to have strong test-taking ability. Alison Richard, President of the University of Cambridge, also praises that "Chinese education is of a strong desire and great motivation, which attaches great importance to basic education, and students have a solid grasp of basic knowledge. In the University of Cambridge, many students from China have achieved good results because of their solid foundation of knowledge [5]. Compared with basic education, Chinese higher education should focus more on the training of students' independent thinking and the cultivation of their ability to independently solve academic problems.

3. Comparison of Learning Autonomy and Interaction between Chinese and American College and University Students

Chinese and American college students show different characteristics in learning situation, of which the main differences are reflected in the autonomy and interaction of students' learning. Learning autonomy is firstly affected by the number and difficulty level of courses taken by students. Either too many courses or too difficult course content will result in the decline of students' learning autonomy. Secondly, if a variety of teaching methods are adopted in the course teaching, student' interest in learning can be increased, and their autonomy in learning and interaction with the course can be indirectly enhanced. Additionally, the requirement of the course for pre-class preparation and after-class assignments is also an effective way to make students actively devote more time to the course study

3.1 Comparison of the Number and Difficulty Levels of Courses Setting

No matter for professional courses or optional courses, Chinese colleges and universities generally adopt the method of "multiple types with less class hours" in courses setting, while American colleges and universities show "less types and more class hours" in courses setting. For instance, some university in China requires English major students to pass 29 professional degree courses and 10 professional optional courses before graduation. At the same time, they need to complete 9 general optional courses and 22 public elementary courses, a total of 70 courses. According to the actual situation, students at the university hope to finish most of the courses in six semesters, so they have to take at least 11 courses every semester. According to the 1.5-hour teaching time per class set by the school, students need to attend classes for at least 16.5 hours per week, which is equivalent to four working days from morning to afternoon. Such a large amount of course time has not yet been added to part of professional degree courses with double class hours. Thus it can be seen that students in this school need to spend a lot of time in a variety of classroom learning. On the other hand, in American colleges and universities, the curriculum setting of professional courses simplifies the tedious and rich options of courses. Besides, it lengthens the teaching time of a single course. For example, the summer session literature course at the University of Pennsylvania is taught twice a week for three hours each time. While the length of a single course has become longer, American college students still spend less time in class than Chinese students, thanks to a sharp drop in the number of courses that students are required to complete. Moreover, they don't have to spend too much time on campus commuting between classes and classes.

Comparing the difficulty level of the course, the courses of American universities are more difficult than those of Chinese universities. According to the survey, although Chinese college students need to take more courses, they actually spend less time in each class. This is not only related to the setting of the course content, but also affected by the requirements of the course on students' mastery. Chinese college students are generally convinced that it is easy to finish the 22 entire courses, while only a few think it is very tough to complete all the courses. [6] However, although there are few types of courses in American universities, American students need to spend a lot of time before, during and after the class to pass the exam due to the difficulty of courses and large amount of homework.

3.2 Comparison of Course Study Requirements and Assignments

Under the influence of the compilation and implementation of teaching syllabus in China and the United States, there are great differences in the pre-class learning requirements and after-class homework assignments of college students. Since the courses of American universities are strictly in accordance with the syllabus, students can clearly understand the pre-class preparation that they need to complete before class by browsing the transparent and open syllabus in the student course system, of which the most distinctive feature is the requirement of a large amount of reading for students before class. In American college classes, teachers provide a large number of reading materials at the end of each class, and students have to finish reading a large number of materials to smoothly get on with the next class. In addition to the text reading materials, teachers also upload the website links, video and academic papers of relevant topics on the course homepage, and ask students to answer the corresponding questions through their own understanding and raise questions about their doubts. With the help of these supplementary materials and visual documents, students not only start the corresponding courses before the formal class, but also exercise their independent learning ability, comprehension ability and ability to digest the data. By contrast, although Chinese university courses also lay out corresponding reading requirements, even though they do not finish the reading, students can still normally participate in the class without affecting the class learning, and teachers do not check and consider whether students finish the pre-class reading homework. From this perspective, American universities have stricter and systematic requirements on students' pre-class preparation, while in China, due to various factors such as the ineffective use of teaching syllabus, students are relatively inattentive and free in the learning process. Consequently, this greater flexibility of course learning also leads to a lower learning autonomy of Chinese students.

In all the composition of teaching content, in addition to the course instruction, American college students attach more importance to homework and examination. American universities lay more emphasis on the assessment of students' daily learning, and pay special attention to students' independent reading and academic writing. Therefore, students need to spend a lot of time on homework, and the completion status can also reflect the students' reading results directly. This interaction also makes the reading process a rigid assignment. Similarly, take the summer session literature course of the University of Pennsylvania as an example. With reference to the teaching syllabus, students are required to upload at least two feedback assignments of reading materials after each class, as well as finish three opinion papers and one final comprehensive project. There is a time limit for each assignment, and in any case overdue assignments are not accepted in the final grade. At the same time, American universities have very strict requirements on writing and citation format of student assignments. The assignment above the set limit of duplicate checking ratio is regarded as plagiarism, and students suspected of plagiarism will face severe penalties such as punishment and withdrawal. For instance, the assignment of literature class attaches great importance to the originality of the viewpoint. In terms of content, each assignment should minimize the quotation or even not cite others' opinions. By contrast, in the literature course of English major in xx university in China, in addition to completing two opinion articles and the final exam, students only need to attend the class on time.

Chinese college students are not only affected by the teaching mode, seldom participating in daily classes, but also do not need to complete the same amount of high-demand homework as American students, which is the result of the setting of teaching content. This shows that American universities' strict requirements and emphasis on students' assignments are not only the concrete embodiment of their teaching objectives and syllabus, but also reflect their educational concepts of attaching importance to students' participation and pursuing students' learning autonomy.

4. Comparison of Chinese and American College and University Students' Performance Evaluation Standards

As the actual embodiment of educational objectives, the differences in the way and basis of students' performance evaluation in Chinese and American colleges and universities come from the

national conditions and cultural differences of two countries. China pursues students' talents and success, while the United States values students' growth and adulthood. Therefore, under such conditions, different evaluation systems of students' performance have been produced [7].

Generally speaking, the performance evaluation standards of Chinese universities are based on the 70% of closed-book final exam scores and 30% of the regular assignments and attendance rate to assess the student's curriculum performance. The final exam content is the extension and development of the classroom teaching content, which aims to test the students' familiarity and mastery of the course. The scores of Chinese college students' mainly manifest as "easy to pass, difficult to get high score". Students have to make more efforts to getting high scores at the end of the semester, but because of the difficulty of the exam, Chinese college teachers usually divide the detailed scope before the exam. Additionally, the content of the exam is mainly based on what teachers teach in class. As a result, Chinese college students can basically pass the exam after a lot of practice. The learning style of doing exercises to pass the final exams not only increases the risk of students' low subjective learning motivation and the dependence on the temporary cramming for the test, but also makes it difficult to examine students' self-exploration and practical ability from the perspective of teaching objectives. Hence, the evaluation method of using the examination paper scores is actually one-sided.

In contrast, American colleges evaluate students' course performance in a more diverse and detailed way. Generally speaking, the examination of students' course performance in American colleges has a large span of time, covering the whole semester according to the chronological order of homework assignment. In terms of evaluation content, American colleges focus on the same final exams, regular performance and attendance as Chinese universities. American colleges also attach great importance to students' performance in class, such as students' enthusiasm and initiative when participating in class discussions and the degree of cooperation and harmony with team members. A large number of pre-class reading tasks and after-class assignments and essays are included in the total score of the course according to a clear proportion, which also makes students pay more attention to each reading and writing task and discussion. It from side aspect reduces the phenomenon that students can pass the exam via cramming for exams. Thus, it can be seen that such a diverse curriculum assessment system in American universities is an effective and comprehensive means to judge whether students are independent, long-term and comprehensive in learning.

5. Summary and Enlightenment

Through the comparison of instructor and instructed two angles and four aspects, it is found that there are great differences between Chinese and American university course education. It is caused by the differences in religious culture, historical background and national conditions of the two countries, which will also consequently have an influence on the educational reform of the two countries in the future.

Focusing on the guidance and implementation of the syllabus will fundamentally optimize the educational objectives of Chinese universities. Enriching the teaching mode and enhancing the participation of students can improve students' independent study ability. Appropriate and efficient curriculum setting and reasonable daily homework quantity enable students to explore and study professional discipline knowledge more deeply and comprehensively. The flexible and rigid dual consideration system for students not only promotes the comprehensive development of students in course learning, but also cultivates the excellent quality of students' perseverance. As a consequence, only by constantly learning from the "outside world" can educators promote the better development of domestic education.

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