

A Probe into the Construction of Outcome-based Online and Offline Blended First-class Curriculum in Application-oriented Universities

Fengmei Zhu^{1,a}

¹ Ningbo University of Finance and Economics

^a Email: Fengmei.zhu@surrey.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The construction of “First-class Curriculum” is a focus of increasing attention in higher education. The concept of it was developed from “Jinke” put forward for the first time at the New Era National Undergraduate Education Work Conference. *Measures for the Recommendation and Recognition of National First-Class Undergraduate Courses* under the *Double Ten Thousand Plan* has subdivided the five types of first-class curriculum construction and clearly pointed out the construction goals and objectives of online and offline blended first-class curriculum. Situated in the application-oriented universities and guided by the concept of “student-centered, outcome-oriented, and continual improvement”, this article explores the connotation of the online and offline blended first-class curriculum. The four-step model of first-class curriculum construction is proposed by the study, including ① well-designed course criteria: accurate positioning and outcome-oriented; ② massively integrated contents: online and offline resources fused as a whole; ③ perfectly tailored teaching methods: online participation and offline interaction; ④ more learning outcomes and higher teaching effectiveness: the teaching objectives obtained. It is hoped that the goal of enhancing teaching and learning efficiency can be achieved through conducting this proposed model of first-class curriculum construction, offering reference for curriculum construction in the new era of higher education.

Keywords: *outcome-based education, first-class curriculum, online and offline blended teaching, application-oriented university*

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching quality is the lifeline of education, and curriculum teaching is the most basic link of teaching activities. In June 2018, at the New Era National Undergraduate Education Work Conference, Minister of Education Chen Baosheng advocated to “turn the low quality *Shuik* into high quality and challenging *Jinke*”. In October, *The Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Accelerating the Construction of High-level Undergraduate Education and Comprehensively Improving Talent Training Ability*^[1] (Jiaogao [2018] No. 2) issued by the Ministry of Education once again clearly stated that it is necessary to “promote the classroom teaching revolution, focus on student development, and continually improve the quality of course teaching.” Wu Yan, director of the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, summarized the *Jinke* standard as high-level, innovative and challenging and later

developed it to be First-class Curriculum. In November 2019, *The Implementation Opinions of the Ministry of Education on the Construction of First-class Undergraduate Courses*^[2] (Jiaogao [2019] No. 8) was issued, which pointed out that the curriculum is the core element of talent training, and the quality of the courses directly determines the quality of talent training, and the improvement of teaching quality lies in the construction of the First-class Curriculum.

Application-oriented university, a new type of school in China’s higher education, is derived from the idea of higher vocational education and differentiates itself from the research-oriented university or the teaching-oriented university. With the transformation of higher education, application-oriented university has come into being to nurture diverse talents needed by market. The construction of first-class curriculum in application-oriented universities determines the foundation of the quality of applied talents training.

During the 13th Five Year Plan period, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Education of China implemented the project of promoting the modernization of education and supported the construction of 100 application-oriented universities recommended by various provinces. By 2018, 300 local undergraduate colleges and universities have participated in the reform pilot. Many colleges and universities have actively explored the reform in school enterprise cooperation, teacher team construction, talent training program and curriculum system reform, and school governance structure. It is expected that by 2022, a large number of regular universities will be transformed into application-oriented universities.

Insofar as talent cultivation is concerned, the application-oriented university adheres to the concept of “student-centered, outcome-oriented, and continual improvement”, focusing on the training of applicable talents at undergraduate level to serve the local economic development by combining vocation, skills and knowledge.

It is therefore worthwhile to discuss the construction of first-class curriculum in application-oriented universities guided by the outcome-based education guidelines. Under this context, this article explores the connotation of online and offline blended first-class curriculum and proposes that first-class curriculum of this kind should be constructed through building outcome-oriented curriculum standards, selecting featured contents, and designing interactive teaching methods, so as to achieve the goal of enhancing teaching and learning efficiency.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Outcome-based Education

The outcome-based theory was put forward by Spady in 1981. It is believed that student learning outcomes under the guidance of the outcome-oriented concept include school learning outcomes, professional or specialized research project learning outcomes, curriculum learning outcomes, unit learning outcomes and classroom learning outcomes. The outcome types include knowledge outcome, capacity outcome and value outcome. [3] Harden et al. (1999) stated: “OBE has two requirements. First, the learning outcomes are identified, made explicit and communicated to all concerned (...). Second, the educational outcomes should be the overriding issue in decisions about the curriculum.” [4]

The outcome-based theory has been heatedly discussed by researchers at home and abroad and massively applied into talent training projects. The focal points include the evaluation criterion and functions of optimizing learning outcomes. Student learning

outcomes are the core content of the evaluation of education and teaching, and the definition of foreign curriculum standards mostly focuses on student learning. *The Common Curriculum Provincial Standards* promulgated by Ontario, Canada defines the curriculum standards as “general standards designed to evaluate student learning”; *The Australian Curriculum Standards Framework* defines curriculum standards as “the main areas of student learning and the learning results achieved by most students in each area of learning” (Cui Yunhuo, 2001) [5]. Shen Tianen et al. (2018) believe that “The ‘outcome’ in the outcome-oriented education concept has three functions: first, the guiding role of learning outcomes helps students to clarify the expected results achieved, and to measure and guide self-learning; second, it can help teachers formulate the teaching plan by choosing more meaningful teaching activities based on the original syllabus and teaching process; third, it helps schools, governments and third-party organizations in society to carry out evaluation.” [6]

Curriculum standard is equivalent to the teaching and learning “contract” signed by teachers and students. Therefore, the curriculum standard emphasizes the results of teaching and learning which are used as the test criteria for students’ final learning effectiveness.

2.2 First-class Curriculum Construction

The construction of first-class curriculum has attracted full attention in the domestic higher education field. Scholars carry out theoretical and practical explorations from the perspective of the connotation, evaluation and construction of first-class courses.

Chen Xiang et al. (2019) pointed out that a scientific and reasonable evaluation system is not only an important part of the curriculum, but also a basic guarantee for improving the quality of talent training, and meanwhile proposed quantitative and qualitative reconstruction from the aspects of overall design, implementation process, calculation methods, and application of evaluation results. [7] Cai Yinghui (2019) proposed in the article *Assessment and First-class Curriculum Construction* that the curriculum design implements the teaching philosophy of “student learning as the centre and learning result-oriented”, paying attention to students’ learning conditions and learning effects under the premise of having clear curriculum goals. The course content should focus on value shaping, personality development, thinking training, ability training and knowledge exploration of students. The organization of the course content should conform to the laws of students’ cognition and the development of modern disciplines. The teaching process should involve teacher-student, student-student interaction. Wisdom interaction and course assessment is a combination of formative evaluation and summative

evaluation, which is a concrete manifestation of the connotation of First-class Curriculum.^[8] From a macro perspective, some scholars have proposed that “First-class Curriculum in the application-oriented universities should embody the “seven characteristics” of being educational, practical, rich, cutting-edge, speculative, academic and artistic (Hou Changlin, 2019)”.^[9]

In terms of the construction of first-class curriculum, under the background of the first-class curriculum construction of local undergraduate colleges in the new era, Wang Lirong et al. (2020) implemented teaching design based on the concept of outcome-oriented curriculum standards. With the overall planning centered around the needs of goal achievement, teaching content, organization and implementation, and multiple evaluations, the teaching effect turned to be remarkable.^[10] Moreover, taking the e-commerce professional course as an example, Zhang Xiaoqin et al. (2021) carried out a first-class curriculum construction exploration guided by “student-centered, data-driven, and result-oriented” concept.^[11]

3. THE FOUR-STEP MODEL OF FIRST-CLASS CURRICULUM CONSTRUCTION

Since 2017, the national boutique online open course platforms (Icourse, Xuetaangzaixian, Zhihuishu, etc.) and the provincial boutique online open course platforms have established and selected a large number of high-quality MOOC resources from many prestigious national universities and colleges. The use of high-quality online resources can make up for the shortcomings of limited offline curriculum teaching resources. It is in line with young learners’ characteristic capabilities of applying information technology in the new era of study. Courses supplemented by suitable online and offline teaching models will help improve the effectiveness of first-class curriculum construction as well as the quality of application-oriented talent training.

Based on the concept of “student-centered, outcome-oriented, and continual improvement”, the four-step model of curriculum construction explored in this article (see Figure 1) provides an effective path for the construction of online and offline blended first-class courses in application-oriented universities and improves the undergraduate classroom teaching quality.

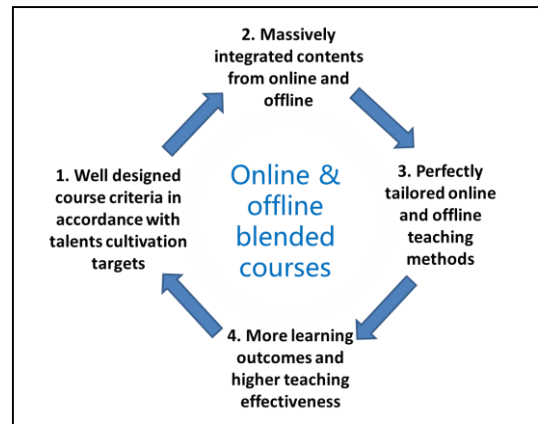


Figure 1 The outcome-based four-step model of first-class curriculum construction

3.1 Well-designed course criteria: accurate positioning and outcome-oriented

Curriculum criteria are teaching guidance documents that stipulate the nature of a certain subject, curriculum objectives, content objectives, and implementation recommendations. Compared with the traditional syllabus, the curriculum criteria are detailed and clear in the basic concepts of the curriculum, curriculum objectives, and curriculum implementation suggestions. In particular, it puts forward the basic learning requirements and achievement requirements for all students. The prerequisites and foundations for the construction of the online and offline blended curriculum is the construction of curriculum criteria. It is believed that online and offline blended first-class curriculum construction demands teachers conduct in-depth discussions on the course, determine the various elements of the course criteria, and embody the course with clear and accurate target positioning, advanced course concept, clear teaching requirements, rich design of outcomes, and multiple evaluation methods. *The New National Curriculum Standard* reflects the characteristics of the online and offline blended teaching mode and is used to guide the development and implementation of the online and offline blended curriculum.^[12]

3.2 Massively integrated contents: online and offline resources fused as a whole

The teaching content of the course should be based on one or several textbooks, but it should not be limited to textbooks. It should extensively collect and integrate subjects or curriculum-related resources and select those that meet the requirements of national standards and school standards to obtain the goals of talent training. In the context of “Internet + teaching”, online and offline blended courses should make full use of high-quality online resources such as MOOCs and SPOCs, pay attention to the in-depth integration, update, and

optimization of online and offline hybrid teaching resources, strengthen ideological and political functions, thereby providing course recipients with rich learning online and offline resources that are modern, cutting-edge, and scientific.

3.3 Perfectly tailored teaching methods: online participation and offline interaction

The design of teaching methods for the curriculum is equally important with the selection of contents. Larry Johnson, the founder of the “Horizon Report”, pointed out in the report that blended learning will be the mainstream learning method in the future, and the focus and core of classroom teaching reform is the fundamental adjustment of the relationship between teaching and learning. To construct first-class online and offline blended curriculum in application-oriented universities, it is believed that teachers should fully apply the “student-centered” concept, morph the traditional relationship between teaching and learning, organize students to actively take part in online and offline learning activities. Participatory learning experience online includes online resource learning, completing homework tests, participating in discussions, and answering questions. Offline face to face teaching contains conducting offline project-based and outcome-oriented presentation in a flipped classroom or blended classroom in the teaching organization forms of group discussion, topic seminar, theme presentation, etc. With the online and offline hybrid collaboration, the online and offline blended curriculum can be organized and promoted to be participatory and interactive, benefiting students from engaging in a first-class teaching ecology.

3.4 More learning outcomes and higher teaching effectiveness: the teaching objectives obtained

The foothold and ultimate goal of the first-class curriculum construction is the promotion and continual improvement of teaching effectiveness. The first-class curriculum has the features of high-quality teaching and learning, is advanced and challenging, and is high-level and innovative. Curriculum learning effectiveness is divided into two levels: micro and macro. The mastery of curriculum content, the absorption and internalization of knowledge, and the improvement of innovative thinking ability are micro-efficiencies; on the other hand, the formation of students’ good learning habits of “must learn”, “eager to learn” and “learn well” as well as the formation of lifelong learning ability are the long-term and ultimate goals of course teaching effectiveness. The online and online blended first-class curriculum strives to highly improve teachers’ teaching effectiveness by supporting students to achieve more high-quality learning outcomes.

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, successful implementation of designing accurate and outcome-oriented course criteria, selecting online and offline teaching content that is deeply integrated, and refining the teaching organization form of online participation and offline interaction in practice will help build up an online and offline blended first-class curriculum which is of high practical meaning in placing positive effects on students, teachers, universities and even higher education.

Nevertheless, the construction of first-class curriculum is still in the preliminary stage. Further research efforts can be made from deepening understanding of the importance of constructing first-class curriculum, further diversifying the construction mode of various types of courses, and enriching online resources, etc., thus to better the quality of curricula and meet the targets of talent cultivation.

AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

The author contributed to the design of the four-step model of online and offline blended first-class curriculum construction and finished the writing of the manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks go to Ningbo University of Finance and Economics for the support it offered to the implementation of the research.

This article is a phased outcome of the research project “Exploration and practice of the construction path of the online and offline blended first-class curriculum of humanities in the context of ‘New Liberal Arts’” (The second batch of classroom teaching reform projects in the “Thirteenth Five-Year Plan” of Zhejiang Province) (Project number: jg20190515)

REFERENCES

- [1] Ministry of Education, The Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Accelerating the Construction of High-level Undergraduate Education and Comprehensively Improving Talent Training Ability, 2018. http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/s7056/201810/t20181017_351887.html.
- [2] Ministry of Education, The Implementation Opinions of the Ministry of Education on the Construction of First-class Undergraduate Courses, 2019. http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/s7056/201810/t20181017_351887.html

- [3] W.G. Spady, K.G. Marshall, *Beyond Traditional Outcome-based Education*, Educational Leadership, 1991, PP. 65-74.
- [4] R. M. Harden, J. R. Crosby, & M. H. Davis, AMEE Guide No 14: Outcome-based education: Part 1—An introduction to outcome-based education, *Medical Teacher*, 1999, PP. 7–14.
- [5] Y. H. Cui, *Interpretation of National Curriculum Standards and Framework*, Global Education Outlook, 2001, PP. 4-9.
- [6] T. E. Shen, L. R. Shen, *The definition, Measurement, and Evaluation of Learning Achievements in the Concept of Outcome-based Education—the Exploration and Practice in the United States*, Higher Education Exploration, 2018, pp. 49-54.
- [7] X. Chen, X. L. Han, Y. Wang, H. Y. Zhang, *Reconstruction of the Evaluation System of Curriculum Teaching Quality and the Construction of First-class Curriculum*, Chinese University Teaching, 2019, pp. 43-48.
- [8] Y. H. Cai, *Assessment and First-class Curriculum Construction*, Chinese University Teaching, 2019, pp. 49-54.
- [9] C. L. Hou, *The “Seven Characteristics” of First-class Curriculum in Application-oriented Colleges and Universities*, Vocational Education Forum, 2019, pp. 58-61.
- [10] L.R. Wang, H. Wu, & X. J. Sun, *Research and Exploration on the Construction Standards of First-class Professional Courses in Local Undergraduate Colleges in the New Era*, Heilongjiang Education (Theory and Practice), 2020, pp.18-19.
- [11] X. Q. Zhang, Y. Bo, G. Zhang, *A Probe into the First-class Curriculum Construction under the “Student-centered, Data-driven and Outcome-oriented” Concept*, Journal of Office Automation, 2021, pp. 9-12.
- [12] Teaching Council Committee of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, *National Standards for Undergraduate Professional Teaching Quality in General Colleges and Universities (Volumes 1 and 2)*, Higher Education Press, 2018.