

Research on Innovative General Education Course Reform in Finance and Economics Academies

Exemplified with Yunnan CJ University

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Abstract—With the deepening of college education and teaching reform, general education has received more and more attention in finance and economics academies. After years of curriculum practice, its reform is picking up great popularity. Thus, practicing general education reform for the time being conforms to the demands of the time and tide. Through categorizing and analyzing problems in present general education practice in finance and economics academies such as irregular general education management system, irrational course structure, limited course resources, rigid teaching method and unsatisfactory teaching quality, this essay casts light on effective ways to optimize general education courses, reform teaching strategy and practice workable management to ensure the success of general education reform.

Keywords—higher education, finance and economics, general education, course reform

I. Introduction

The objective of practicing general education is to extend the teaching basis of the secondary education. General education is an extensive and all-round education of non-professional and non-utilitarian basic knowledge, skill and attitude, aiming at bringing up sound and round human beings. In other words, it is an education that cultivates college students' sense and mind, allowing them to grow into a forward-looking and inclusive human being; someone with foresight, refined spirit and elegance. So it goes without saying that the diversification and variation of general education is significant in college education.

A. Literature Review

Researches on general education reform have been done from different perspectives both in China and abroad. In 2006, Meng Yonghong mentioned in "Practice and Exploration on

the Construction of Undergraduate General Education Courses" that general education should be regarded as an educational ideology and concept and weaved through higher education. In 2013, in "Analysis of General Education Curriculum Provision in Universities of China", Hu Liping proposed that American professor Packard initially integrated general education into college education at the beginning of 19th century. According to him, universities should offer young adults highly comprehensive education including "classical, literary and scientific" knowledge. In 1920s, Mr. Mei Yiqi, president of Tsinghua University in China stated universities should not cultivate "experts in certain field" but "talents in general areas". In 2012, Yu Fujun wrote in "Practice on Construction of General Education Curricula System in Local Undergraduate Colleges" that general education courses were the major field and channel of practicing general education. The incomplete course construction is the major factor that hinders the successful development of general education. So it is necessary to analyze the major problems in the construction of general education curricula system in local undergraduate colleges and discuss methods to optimize its setup.

B. Basic Concept of General Education

General education regards students in the educational system as independent and integrated individuals and offers education for all-around development, aiming at cultivating eligible citizens for modern society. It further imparts scientific and cultural knowledge and encourages other accomplishment to form a systematic knowledge frame, as a result of which, fosters students' basic capability and allows

them to develop strong skillset. ¹

In this course, students will be able to understand the relationship between self and the nature, self and the others, self and the environment, as well as self and the social rationality, all of which will contribute to their full transformation to social man.

The word “general” in general education indicates the education shall be resourceful, extensive, comprehensive and multidimensional. The general education is both instructive and cultural, striving for the pursuit of freedom and nobility at its core.

C. Present Status of General Education Reform in Yunnan CJ University

A. History of Yunnan CJ University

CJ University originates from Yunnan Finance Cadre School of 1951 which launched finance and trade classes in 1979 recruiting associate-degree students. Yunnan Institute of Finance and Economics was set up in 1981 for full-time undergraduate education. It was listed as a provincial key university by Yunnan Provincial Government in 1995 and renamed as Yunnan CJ University in 2006. Currently, it has 53 undergraduate programs with a developed multilevel system for talents cultivation which streamlines undergraduate, graduate and PhD education and incorporates schools for international students and continuing education. Featured with economics and management science, it has become a comprehensive university with other majors such as law, philosophy, literature, science, engineering and art, all developing jointly. ²

B. General Education Mode in CJ University

Under the personalized quality education ideology of unification of erudition and specialization, the general education in CJ University is divided into six categories: philosophic wisdom and scientific thinking; ecological environment and life care; world vision and cultural communication; science and technology development and social progress; cultural heritage classics reading; aesthetics and art experience. Courses are academic units-based and

implement “basic education plus professional education” mode. That is to say, courses are composed of five modules: general education course (including general education basis and general education core) + subject foundation course+ specialized course +professional development course (school-wide optional course) + social practice and innovative course. Students majoring in science and engineering, economics and management, and liberal arts and law shall score 60-65 credits in general education courses which take up 36.36%-38.24% of the total compulsory credits in all majors. This system aims at cultivating specialized and versatile modern professionals with interdisciplinary, applicable and hands-on knowledge.

C. General Education Reform in CJ University

In order to meet the market economy’s demand for talents with integrated quality, Yunnan CJ University consistently follows the guiding ideology – an education based on Yunnan but faces the whole nation; one emphasizes quality, efficiency and unique features to train qualified talents. Credit system management took effect in the year of 2000 in CJ University and general education started in September, 2008. The school constructed the school-wide general education course system meticulously, selected instructors carefully, took pains to design the course scheme and endeavored to explore methods for general education reform and practice. Students from CJ University have been required to attend six categories of the general education courses and acquire 12 credits to get their bachelor degree regardless of their majors since 2008.

Problems arose over years of general education practice. Initially, due to the lack of special management institution, qualified faculty and standard teaching syllabus, teachers from different departments reserved too much freedom in applying for and offering courses; as a result, the course names were myriad. The absence of teaching syllabus and textbook, together with the randomness in teaching impeded teaching quality. Thus, in 2013, the original six categories of the core course in general education mode was revised to current four categories. The Office of Educational Administration took the responsibility of clearing and specifying course names. Teachers were required to submit relevant materials for school’s evaluation before they

¹ Zhang Xiaoxu, “Problems and Solutions to General Education Curriculum Provision in Universities of China”, Changchun Normal University Journal (Humanity and Social Science Edition), 2012.7

² <http://www.ynufe.edu.cn/xxgk/xxjj/index.htm>

officially started a course. Finally, the general education was regulated by teaching administration. Undergraduate students were requested to study the four categories of the core course in general education and seek eight credits to get the degree.

The talents training mode of Yunnan CJ University essentially differs from the “knowledge-oriented education regardless of ability and competence cultivation” in the past. Rather, it demonstrates versatility, fundamentality and applicability of undergraduate education as well as highlights the selectivity, independence and individuality in students’ self-learning and self-development.¹

IV. Factors Restricting General Education Course Reform in Institutions of Finance and Economics

Despite the significance of general education in cultivating innovative talents in finance and economics sector, it descends to subordinate position in real practice and receives little attention from institutions of finance and economics. Many problems still exist in general education course reform.

A. Deficiency and Irrationality in Planning General Education Course Structure

Problems have been found during the general education course reform: ignorance of the connotative meaning in general education courses, absence of well-developed ideology guidance in designing general education course syllabus, disorders in curriculum provision due to inconsistent ideology understanding and divided course planning. Some courses even renamed specialized courses to general education courses. In short, the general education practice lacks clear objective and teaching philosophy, leaving overall planning and arrangement out of consideration.

In addition, course resources in institutions of finance and economics concentrate on the application and utilization of “finance and economics”, lacking humanities, artistic cultivation and technological development courses. General education courses are offered on the strength of teachers instead of the value of the courses themselves. The low

satisfaction in teaching efficiency from the students is the result of irrational curriculum provision and superficial understanding of general education and its teaching objective.² The general education optional courses are less useful than specialized courses and less mandatory than required courses, so they are rarely valued by teachers and students. Due to their low status, they are always excluded by other courses.

B. Education Resources Shortage and Poor Teaching Quality

Most of the instructors and professors in institutions of finance and economics are economics or management majors. The shortage of faculty members in social science sectors is out of step with general education reform, which has become a growing concern. General education demands courses on natural science, humanities, social science and so on, so it leads to the absence of qualified teachers in certain subjects especially in natural science.

On the other hand, general education courses are not as important as other courses in many aspects. For instance, classes are usually taught in the form of lectures in the evening to students of different majors and levels, which leads to slack supervision during class. The high passing rate in the final exams and truancy free of punishment result in unsatisfactory teaching efficacy and poor quality in general education courses.

C. Teaching Contents and Organization to be Improved

Some institutions of finance and economics only concern about course structure and format planning and requirement when carrying out general education. General education course module partition rests on categories, course numbers or required credits, barely exploring teaching contents, organization or teaching method reform. The general education courses are monotonous during which big lecture mode is adopted and each class has a large number of registered students. So class presentation and discussion are rare and the classes are teacher-oriented. Teaching contents are superficial, plain and deficient in terms of student-teacher interaction, communication and problem discussion. The lack of students’ independent study and reflection makes it difficult

¹ Chen Hui, “*Survey Report on General Education Mode in Institutions of Finance and Economics*”, New Curriculum Research, 2010. 8

²Ni Xin, “*Reflections on Existing Problems in General Education in Universities*”, Theory Research, 2013.14

to achieve the goal of exercising thinking ability, curiosity and problem-solving.¹

D.Mismanagement in General Education

Most of the institutions of finance and economics lack specialized general education management organizations and the teaching resources distribution and management work is currently done by specific divisions from the Office of Educational Administration. The lack of school's attention to general education courses leads to its mismanagement. Worse still, insufficient teaching supervision, incomplete teaching quality evaluation system and ineffective teaching reform measures are undermining the general education courses, which in turn make some of the elective general education courses one that helps students to get high score, GPA or credits. Furthermore, its evaluation system is too random. Some teachers give easy tests even leak test questions in advance. In short, the testing system is too simple and inflexible.

E.Students' Heavy Utilitarianism and Pragmatism

Today's society is full of competition, but institutions of finance and economics still occupy the dominant position. Once students enter these universities, the majority of their time will be spent on sitting exams for certificates of various types, qualifications or other credentials; to achieve that, little time is left for general education courses. Students study general education courses only to accumulate enough credits for graduation and degree rather than their own needs so it results in utilitarianism in these courses. The end goal of the educational philosophy in general education courses is stifled and the purpose of general education reform makes little achievement.

V.Methods to Improve General Education Course Reform in Institutions of Finance and Economics

A.Rational Optimization in General Education Course Resources

The general education course provision should be interdisciplinary and comprehensive: humanities and sociology courses shall be inclusive of some scientific spirit;

¹ Liu Chujia, "Course Provision and Optimization of General Education Courses in Universities – Exemplified with Local Undergraduate Universities", Guangzhou University Journal (Humanity and Social Science Edition), 2009.3

natural science courses shall contain certain literary and artistic cultivation. Only when both are interrelated and interpenetrated can we work out ways to integrate humanistic spirit to break the boundaries of different disciplines and synthesize students' literary cultivation, artistic forms, scientific learning and nobility as one. Thus, multidisciplinary balance and interdisciplinary rationality shall be achieved through course structures. General education courses shall be enriched based on full understanding of needs from the society and students for the schools to provide students more options and inform them the knowledge they are supposed to acquire. In this way, general education courses can be inspiring and distinctive.

B.Reinforcement of the Teaching Team in General Education Course

Teachers are principal subjects of teaching activities, so quality faculty is essential to the proper functioning of schools. Short term training should be offered to teachers of general education courses to elevate their literary and artistic cultivation. The key of teaching team reconstruction is the improvement of the teaching quality. Lectures by experts in general education can be provided to teachers from different subjects for greater course concept, which can help them find a conjunction point between individual specialty and general education. Teachers should be encouraged to actively participate in relevant seminars to raise their educative awareness and enhance their teaching skills and teaching levels.²

C.Standardization of General Education Course Management

"General Education Center" or "General Educational Teaching Instruction Committee" should be established in institutions of finance and economics to develop general education courses and relevant application, provision and evaluation systems. The standardization of general education is achieved through effective management, control and coordination so as to maximize teaching quality.³ Thus, the practice of general education demands a set of standard

² Zhang Jianbo, "Problems and Solutions to General Education Practice in Institutions of Finance and Economics", Southwest Petroleum University Journal (Humanity and Social Science Edition), 2010.11

³ Wang Jianzeng, "Researches on Strategies of General Education Practice in Local Universities", Management Journal, 2010.8

management principles and methods for course teaching to meet the requirement of training objectives.

D.Measures to Improve General Education Course Teaching Quality and Contents

Teaching methods of general education courses should differ from specialized courses. General education courses lay emphasis on the width of knowledge so teaching should stress both the point and scope of the knowledge. Since students are from various majors and grades, teachers should screen and optimize teaching contents in general education courses to make the class interesting and informative – neither contents nor theoretical background should be neglected. The selected contents should be common, simple and straightforward in course planning and teaching. Both students' professional knowledge, background and their comprehension receptivity abilities should be taken into account during teaching practice. Teachers in general education courses should pursue class teaching art and adopt appropriate teaching method and superb teaching skill¹ to improve teaching efficacy.

E.Intriguing Students Though Effective Course Management

For one thing, teaching management should take different forms and the course organization of general education can be diversified and multilevel. The achievement assessment should be based on class attendance, participation, assignment, quizzes and so on. Tests can be closed-book or open-book or in other forms like book reports, surveys, or papers to evaluate students' academic performance. For another, teachers should reinforce daily teaching inspection and evaluation and strengthen attendance management. Students should be encouraged select interdisciplinary courses and sign in courses of other majors for self-development and erudition. Teachers should guide students to choose difficult courses based on one's needs and practice strict self-discipline to strengthen students' proactivity and quality.

VI. Conclusions

In conclusion, general education is not general knowledge course which touches a little bit of everything. Instead, it aims at guiding students to put book knowledge

into practice and integrating different knowledge as a whole. Education innovation is the way to cultivate competitive students, and it could be realized by general education. General education with distinctive features in institutions of finance and economics will eventually produce talents with high creativity and competitiveness.

General education is beyond imparting knowledge but it teaches interdisciplinary knowledge and cultivates literary spirit. Under the concept of "individual-oriented quality education unifying erudition and specialty", universities should advocate the combination and integration of different subjects, unification of humanistic and scientific spirit, cohesion of morality and knowledge, as well as coordination of technical skills and aesthetic education to train modern talents with multi-skills and integrated knowledge.

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