

Reflections on the Curriculum Reform of “College Chinese Language and Literature” in Private Universities

Yu Qiao

Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences, Houhhot, Inner Mongolia, 010070, China

Abstract: Currently, in the teaching practice of "College Chinese Language and Literature" in private universities, issues such as the "exam-oriented" and "marginalization" of the subject, and the disconnection between teaching and actual needs, have been exposed. To address these problems, approaches can be taken from three aspects: the use of the "Flipped Classroom" teaching model, focusing on student demand orientation, and reforming the assessment mechanism. Especially for private universities, only through reform of the "College Chinese Language and Literature" course can it truly serve students, cultivate comprehensively developed applied talents, and contribute to the country's high-quality development.

Keywords: Private Universities; College Chinese Language and Literature; Curriculum Reform

1. Background of the "College Chinese Language and Literature" Course Setting in Private Universities

In recent years, with the popularization of higher education, private universities have developed rapidly. By the end of 2019, there were 434 private universities in China, with 4.39 million students, accounting for 34.3% of the national number of undergraduate colleges and 25.1% of the undergraduate student population.^[1] Private universities have become a formidable force, cultivating a large number of applied talents for the nation. Private universities have gradually established their own positioning in development. Private universities belong to applied universities, which aim to cultivate applied talents. Compared with research-oriented universities that mainly cultivate research talents, the employment orientation of private universities that focusing on students' professional capabilities and employment competitiveness, and striving to cultivate students' innovative spirit and practical abilities is clearer and more prominent. In contrast to vocational colleges and technical colleges that cultivate professional and technical talents, private colleges require students to have more solid professional knowledge and a stronger theoretical foundation.

“College Chinese Language and Literature” is a public course designed for students in higher education institutions who are not majoring in Chinese language and literature. The purpose of the course is to enhance students' comprehension and language application skills. At the same time, it also aims to improve students' literary appreciation and aesthetic abilities, making it a required course for improving students' overall quality. The establishment of the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course plays a significant role in enhancing students' cultural confidence. For students in private universities, the introduction of the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course is beneficial in cultivating application-oriented talents with broad perspectives, solid foundations, and quality, and it's also plays an important role in strengthening students' comprehensive abilities and competitiveness.

2. Issues in the Instruction of “College Chinese Language and Literature” at Private Universities

The importance of “College Chinese” course is self-evident to private undergraduate colleges. However, in the current practical teaching practice, some problems have been exposed, which should arouse educators' attention and thinking.

The significance of the “College Chinese Language and Literature” curriculum is self-evident for private universities. However, in the current practical teaching progress, several issues have been revealed that warrant the attention and contemplation of educators.

2.1 The “exam-oriented” of “College Chinese Language and Literature”

In the pedagogical practice of classroom instruction, the teaching of “College Chinese Language and Literature” is susceptible to the issue of “exam-oriented”. The term “exam-oriented” denotes a pedagogical approach wherein educators perpetuate the educational paradigms of secondary school Chinese language education, with an emphasis on examination-oriented instruction, thereby rendering “grades” as the pivotal metric for assessing students’ academic proficiency. Consequently, in the classroom instruction, a considerable number of college Chinese language educators commence their teaching of Chinese classical texts with word-by-word analysis and demand that students memorize significant paragraphs or chapters; when teaching Chinese modern texts, they require students to read aloud, analyze the meaning of each paragraph, and ultimately synthesize the content learned to arrive at a uniform conclusion. In the final assessment, there are two forms: examination and assessment. The examination necessitates students to memorize a substantial amount of relevant knowledge and key points prior to the exam; whereas the assessment form involves assigning homework, and students can earn the corresponding credits by providing answers that are almost identical to the knowledge imparted in class. Within this mode of teaching and assessment, “College Chinese Language and Literature” has become a mere continuation of secondary school Chinese language education, and students have not achieved genuine advancement.

At the university level, students are required to draw upon their knowledge base and emotional experiences to understand and appreciate literary works, while also developing independent thinking skills, logical reasoning abilities, and linguistic competence. Therefore, the teaching of the “College Chinese Language and Literature” curriculum should not be an extension of secondary school Chinese education.

2.2 The "marginalization" of the "College Chinese Language and Literature" course

The “College Chinese Language and Literature” course, which is part of general education and a public course, has been receiving a lower degree of emphasis, leading to a situation of marginalization.

One significant reason for the “marginalization” of the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course lies in students’ perception of the course’s attributes. Within the current educational system, students’ majors come with core courses that are closely related to their future personal development and career planning; courses such as advanced mathematics and college English are intimately connected to postgraduate entrance examinations and CET (College English Test). These courses are deemed “useful” by students, who naturally pay more attention and time to them. In contrast, the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course appears to be “useless,” leading to a lack of sufficient attention from students during the learning process, with frequent occurrences of students using their phones or reading major-specific books in class. In addition to this, in teaching practice, many teachers continue the teaching methods from middle school for the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course. Students do not gain new knowledge in the learning process but instead repeatedly review what they have already learned in high school, thus reducing their interest in the course. This also leads to the course itself being undervalued. In light of this, the marginalization of the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course is inevitable.

2.3 The disconnect between teaching content and actual demand

In the current “College Chinese Language and Literature” curriculum, there is a phenomenon of disconnection between teaching and actual needs. The issues with textbooks and the knowledge taught by teachers in the classroom are difficult to quickly transform into what students need.

The current “College Chinese Language and Literature” textbooks focus more on reading and appreciation. Taking the mainstream “College Chinese Language and Literature” textbooks as an example: the “College Chinese Language and Literature (Fourth Edition)” published by Higher Education Press is divided into four parts: “Modern Texts,” “Ancient Texts,” “Poetry,” and “Western Translations,” with nearly seventy excellent literary works selected from ancient and modern times, as well as from both domestic and international origins. However, there are no chapters set up to improve students’ oral expression and writing skills. The “College Chinese Language and Literature (Eleventh Edition)” published by East China Normal University Press is divided into twelve units, each with a distinct humanistic theme, selecting excellent literary works for students to read, and setting up “Examples of Literary Studies” to enhance students’ writing skills through “Argumentative Text or Persuasive Text,” “Lyric Text or Expressive Text,” “Character Portrayal,” and “Narrative text.” However, there is still no focus on students’ oral expression abilities. Teachers explain according to the textbook arrangement, lack of the expansion of knowledge, and they have not pay attention to the requirements of language ability of students’ future job positions. During the classroom teaching process, the author found that students require a considerable amount of time to organize their oral expressions, and their discourse often lacks logical coherence, which can sometimes even affect communication and understanding. And in their written assignments, students frequently exhibit unclear expressions and semantic

confusion, indicating an urgent need to improve their written expression skills.

The abilities of written composition and oral expression, which are key to enhancing the comprehensive competitiveness of applied talents, are often neglected, which is detrimental to the development of applied talents. There are two main reasons for the neglect of these two abilities: First, classroom time is limited. "College Chinese Language and Literature" courses typically have two class hours per week, with more than a hundred students, hence it is impossible for teachers to provide speaking opportunities for all students and also difficult to correct homework for all students every week; second, the teaching concept is outdated. Many teachers believe that the "College Chinese Language and Literature" course only needs to explain the text and impart related knowledge, thereby neglecting the cultivation of students' writing and expressive abilities."

3. Several Perspectives on the Curriculum Reform of "College Chinese Language and Literature" in Private Universities

In light of the issues revealed in the teaching of the "College Chinese Language and Literature" course in current private undergraduate colleges, educators should promptly shift their thinking and seek solutions to these problems.

3.1 The Use of the "Flipped Classroom" Instructional Model

In the "College Chinese Language and Literature" course, teachers can adopt the "Flipped Classroom" approach, which cedes more classroom time to students. This method enhances students' awareness learning and cultivates their critical thinking skills.

In teaching practice, the author teaches the poem "*Rainy Alley*" to students majoring in Computer Science in the Department of Engineering Management. This poem has been selected in the "Chinese (Compulsory I)" textbook for high school students by the People's Education Press, and most students have already studied it, understanding the author's life, the background of the poem's creation, and the connotation of the poetry. Therefore, the teaching objective for this poem is no longer to analyze the poetry itself, but to focus on training students' appreciation skills, independent learning abilities, and critical thinking skills. The author divided the students into twelve groups before class, then the author arranged for the students to review the content of the poem, study relevant materials, watch documentaries about the poet Dai Wangshu, and take related MOOC courses offered by the school. Students were asked to find new perspectives for understanding the poetic text and to reinterpret the poem. After a week of preparation, students presented their research results in group reports. In addition to the traditional "Socio-Historical Criticism Method", students also analyzed the poem from the perspectives of psychoanalysis, biographical criticism, and cultural criticism. In the flipped classroom, students expanded the breadth of content far beyond the breadth that relies solely on teacher lectures.

In summary, the use of the "Flipped Classroom" approach has broken the traditional format in "College Chinese Language and Literature" classes where the teacher played a "solo performance" and "standard answers" no longer appear in the classroom. This method returns more autonomy in learning to the students and encourages them to think actively, rather than being confined to the habitual thinking left over from exam-oriented education.^[2]

3.2 Teaching Based on Student Needs

Teaching based on student needs is oriented around the requirements of students. Strengthening the connection between the curriculum and the actual needs of students is urgently needed to enhance the proportion of the language application module in "College Chinese Language and Literature" teaching. In the written language application module, first, focus on the logic of students, integrating the content of "Formal Logic" into writing, so as to cultivate students to have clear logic and clear organization in written expression; second, cultivate the standardization of language of students to reduce linguistic errors and misuse of punctuation; finally, focus on the writing of practical texts, familiarizing students with various practical text styles, understanding writing norms, and connecting students' campus life with future career life. On this basis, teachers of "College Chinese Language and Literature" can give students more opportunities for oral expression to comprehensively and multi-dimensionally improve students' language application level, and meet the development needs of students in the future. The author has tried to increase the proportion of practical text writing in classroom teaching, set up a practical text writing unit, teach basic practical text writing, and require students to complete related homework; at the same time, the author add a "ten minutes before class" module, which require students to express their views on designated social hot issues. At the end of the semester, teachers of related professional courses reflected that the logic of students' term papers has been improved, and students' language application ability has been effectively enhanced.

Furthermore, it is essential to associate the "College Chinese Language and Literature" course with students' majors as much as possible. Different course focuses should be established according to the actual needs of various majors. In practical classroom teaching, the author has found that students majoring in early childhood education are future kindergarten teachers who need to cultivate children's language abilities in their work. Therefore, in the "College Chinese Language and Literature" course, these students

pay more attention to the appreciation of simple ancient poems and fairy tales; whereas accounting students pay more attention on practical writing. Hence, when facing students of different majors, teachers should pay attention to their future development direction and actual needs. In general, teachers should tailor their instruction to the needs of students from different majors, and they need to devising distinct teaching plans and, as much as possible, practicing ‘teaching based on student needs’ to meet the developmental demands of students’ future careers.

3.3 Refine the Course Assessment Mechanism

The end-of-semester final exams or assessments have become the sole criterion for evaluating students’ learning outcomes in the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course, which is clearly not conducive to stimulate students’ enthusiasm. Taking exams as an example, students are inevitably caught in a vicious cycle of “highlighting key points before the exam - preparing for the exam by rote memorization - returning the knowledge to the teacher after the exam”, which significantly reduces the reliability and validity of the exam. Therefore, in assessing learning outcomes, the author focuses more on daily performance, with classroom participation accounting for 20% of the total grade, group discussion performance accounting for 40%, practical writing assignments accounting for 20%, and the final exam (assignment) accounting for 20%. This method of performance assessment mobilizes students’ enthusiasm, enhances classroom participation, and more reasonably evaluates students’ learning levels.

4. Conclusion

Using the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course as a powerful tool is essential for cultivating applied talents who are diligent in thinking and adept at expression, thereby providing impetus for accelerating the modernization process with Chinese characteristics and high-quality development. Therefore, in the teaching of the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course in private universities, Educators should keep pace with the times, aiming at moral education and the cultivation of talent, continuously renewing their teaching philosophy and methods, and strengthening the cultivation of students’ ability for independent learning. They should also pay attention to the connection between the curriculum and the actual needs of students, thereby truly achieving “teaching students in accordance with their aptitude” and “teaching based on student needs”; at the same time, they should innovate the assessment and evaluation mechanisms to enhance students’ interest in learning. In the future, making the “College Chinese Language and Literature” course truly a course that attracts and serves students should be the common goal of all educators.

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