Analysis on the Reform of Course Assessment in Chinese Universities

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Abstract. Although there are many similarities between the course assessment methods in Chinese and foreign universities, there are also a number of differences. The course assessment in foreign universities can improve students’ learning enthusiasm, motivate the class participation, and foster students’ professional skills and abilities. Drawing on the experience of the course assessment in foreign universities, Chinese universities should give the teachers enough rights to choose the course assessment method independently and guide the teachers to distribute diverse examination methods flexibly in the teaching process. The reform of course assessment should guide the students to arrange their studying rationally, to improve their theoretical knowledge, practical abilities and relearning abilities effectively.

Introduction

The purpose of the course assessment is to promote students’ professional knowledge and skills, increase students' lifelong learning ability and innovative ability. Course assessment is not the end of the course, but an important part of the teaching. It not only evaluates students’ learning level, but also feedbacks the problems existing in the course teaching, guides students to form good learning habits, and effectively promotes students' learning motivation. It is reasonable to distribute course assessment rationally in each teaching session.

The current course assessment method shows the following drawbacks in Chinese universities. First, the weight of closed-book exams is very high, which is difficult to assess the comprehensive ability of students to apply professional knowledge and skills. Sun and Zhang (2015)\cite{1} used the analytic hierarchy process (AHP) to analyze which assessment method is better to evaluate students’ comprehensive professional ability, and they found that assignments and classroom case discussions are better than closed-book examinations, however, these assessment methods were not used enough in Chinese universities. Second, open-book examination, “one-page” examination, course paper, oral examination and some other examinations are good assessment methods, but these methods are not widely used.\cite{2} Furthermore, because these methods are subject to the teachers’ personal opinions, fairness and impartiality are basic requirements of using them. However, the current examination discipline and other related systems for using these methods are imperfect, which may affect the fairness.

The current course assessment method has not been able to mobilize students' interest in learning. Students usually spend a lot of time cramming for their final exams. The classroom attendance and participation is low. Students only pay attention to the test scores, and they do not care about the original goal of learning. Zong et al. (2014) surveyed in Jilin University and found that the proportion of students who were dissatisfied with the current course assessment method was as high as 19.23%\cite{3}.

Whether the course assessment method is reasonable or not affects the teaching efficiency directly, and affects the students' learning effectiveness and employability ultimately. Without reforming the course assessment method, it is difficult to achieve good teaching quality. This paper will compare the course assessment differences between Chinese and foreign universities, discusses the improvement strategies of Chinese universities.
International Comparison of the University Course Assessment

Differences in the Assessment Methods and Related Policies

The common methods of course assessment in foreign universities include classroom tests, written assignments, group subjects, online tests, mid-term exams, final exams, etc. The methods of Chinese university course assessment look similar to that of the foreign countries, but the details are quite different.

Assessment Methods Bundle and Score Weights. In foreign universities, teachers usually choose three to five ways to evaluate students' grade. Each assessment method is independently weighted. Generally, the weight does not exceed 40%. There is no obvious primary or secondary assessment method. The weight of the final exam is not outstanding, and some courses do not set a final exam. Final exam takes 70% of the total grade in most universities in China. All kinds of usual assessment methods other than final exam account for 30% of the total score, and each method has a small weight, so the effect is limited.

Teacher's Rights. In the course assessment of foreign universities, the teachers of the class have strong decision-making power, and the course assessment management of Chinese universities has strong system specification.

First, there is a big difference in teacher's rights to set assessment methods. In foreign countries, teachers choose assessment methods and set the weight of each method. The universities have no institutional restrictions. Chinese universities have special policies that clearly specify the details of assessment methods, assessment content, difficulty level, and question types. They will check whether the tests comply with the policies.

Second, the rights to determine the content of course assessment are different. In foreign countries, the university only puts forward the overall requirements for the course objectives, and does not stipulate specific teaching content and assessment content. Teacher makes a syllabus based on the overall teaching objectives, lists the main topics and assessment scope of the teaching, and does not list detailed knowledge points. The examination specification policies of Chinese universities require the assessment content to cover the basic content stipulated in the course syllabus. The university authorities formulate the syllabus of each course. The course syllabus covers the teaching contents, teaching methods and basic knowledge points such as concepts and principles.

Third, there is a big difference in the rights to adjust scores. Teachers can adjust weight as need and no application and approval required to do the adjustment. The score adjustment plan is open and transparent, and is suitable for all students who meet the adjustment conditions. Teachers will not adjust the test scores of individual students individually. Chinese universities have strict inspection procedures for marking work. Teachers are not allowed to change scores at will.

Score Correction. Teachers usually return the exam papers, papers and homework to the students, and publish answers after exam in foreign universities. If the students find the marks are incorrect, they can let the teachers correct the mistakes, which play a direct supervisory role in the course assessment. Chinese universities do not let students check and change points separately with the class teacher. They need to submit a written application to the school to check the papers within the prescribed period. The Academic Affairs Department retains all final exam papers.

Academic Integrity. Academic integrity applies to all work, including assignments, papers and exam in foreign universities. The instructor prompts the student to abide by the school's relevant regulations. Chinese universities have serious regulations on the final exam discipline. The school's Academic Affairs Office organizes the inspection team to inspect the final exam, ignore the violation of the usual assessment methods.

Differences in the Assessment Efficiency

Class Attendance Rate. Teachers seldom emphasize attendance in class in foreign universities. The attendance rate of students is very high. Chinese students have formed passive learning habits for many years, and classroom participation is poor. Although college teachers use various
participatory teaching methods to stimulate students' participation in classroom participation, without corresponding reform of assessment methods, the effect is poor. Many teachers use attendance scores to improve attendance, but the attendance scores take no more than 20% of the total scores, even the students lost all the attendance scores, they still have chances to pass the exam. As a result, the role of attendance score is weak.

**Rationality of Study Schedule.** According to the forgotten curve of the German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus, memory loss is rapid and huge within the first few days of learning. However, the rate of memory loss decreases from then on. Reviewing within the first 15 days of learning helps form a solid memory. If not, only 21% of memory retains after 31 days. Quiz, assignment, and mid-term exam have great weights in foreign universities. Therefore, students will never relax their studies in the whole semester, which helps form a solid memory. Final exam takes great share of total grade in China. Many teachers narrow the review content before the exam. Students can pass the exam easily and even get high scores with taking one week or one day to review before the final exam. It is easy to breed a tendency to not study hard at ordinary times. Such review only forms short-term memory.

**Application Capability Development.** Group project is widely used in course assessment in foreign universities, and its weight is 20% to 40%. The content of group project is more practical. It not only improves students' professional skills, writing skills and teamwork spirits, but also helps the student become a self-directed leaner. Some foreign teachers also use group project in Chinese universities, and find that this method is difficult to implement smoothly in Chinese universities. First, due to the lack of strict academic integrity system, most students just copy papers. Second, the students score high on each other when they evaluate each other, and they cannot reflect the actual contribution of each student in the group.

**Difficulties of Course Assessment Reform in China**

In order to improve students' enthusiasm for learning, the assessment methods of foreign universities are worth learning, but there are many difficulties in implementing them.

**Institutional Constraints**

Different courses have different characteristics. The assessment method should be flexibly set according to the characteristics of the course and the number of students in the class. At present, Chinese universities generally use the same course assessment norms. The regulations are too detailed and the teacher's right is very limited.

**Customary Constraints**

First, teachers have become accustomed to the current assessment methods, especially the teachers who have been teaching for many years. The implementation of new teaching model reforms may provoke opposition. Because the course assessment method of foreign universities gives teachers greater right, the reform will become a mere formality if the teacher does not support the new assessment method. Second, if the teacher's right is improved, and the teacher's evaluation cannot surpass the shackles of the human society, the reform will cause confusion. Third, students are accustomed to using the busy week before the exam to exchange for decent grades. Under the new assessment method, if the students can't adjust their study habits, their grades may be lower.

**Workload Constraints**

With abundance assignments, periodic exams, mid-term exams, final exams, and group project papers to mark, the workload of teachers increase greatly. If the teacher is unwilling to take a complicated course assessment method, the effect of the course assessment reform will reduce.
Class Size Constraints
In foreign countries, there are less than 30 students in most classes. In China, the number of natural classes is generally more than 30. It is inconvenient to use assessment methods such as class discussion, team presentation, and quiz in a large class.

Suggestions for Course Assessment Reform in Chinese Universities
Breaking the Institutional and Customary Constraints by the Lead of Teachers
First, it is necessary to encourage teachers to promote teaching through classroom discussions, course papers, and group projects. Second, it is necessary to cultivate teachers' fairness in the course assessment and enhance the transparency of marking work. All exam papers should be returned to the students. The best supervisors are students rather than officially organized supervisory groups. Establishing a benign relationship between teachers and students in the exam, and changing the course assessment from one-way control to two-way understanding is a necessary condition for students to understand the significance of course assessment and improve the initiative and enthusiasm of learning.

Promoting the Teaching Assistant System to Reduce Workload Pressure
In foreign universities, doctoral students, master students or senior undergraduates with good academic performance can apply for teaching assistants. They attend each class, making notes, and assist the classroom work. They guide students to review, do exercises, and answer questions through tutorial classes at least once a week with fixed time and classrooms. They review homework and papers, and exam papers. If Chinese universities adopt the teaching assistant system, the teaching assistant will undertake the workload increased by the course assessment reform.

Using Online Test Bank to Improve Work Efficiency
Chinese universities use online teaching platforms and other modern means to conduct course assessments later than foreign universities, but the development momentum is rapid. Using online test bank provided by domestic and foreign publishers and educational service institutions to support the course materials can help teachers save time.

Advocating Small Size Classes to Eliminate the Class Size Constraints
Set a reasonable proportion of teachers and students, and promote small class teaching, so that teachers can flexibly apply different course assessment methods. For courses that cannot reduce class size due to lack of teachers, network teaching and assessment methods are worth to try.

Broaden International Vision
Increasing the international cooperation between universities can enhance the understanding of the assessment methods of foreign universities. First, let more teachers and students go abroad and experience the course assessment in foreign universities. Second, hire more excellent foreign teachers to teach in Chinese universities, which will enable Chinese teachers and students to develop an international vision.

Conclusion
In short, there are big differences in the course assessment methods in universities in Chinese and foreign countries. The flexible and diverse course assessment methods in foreign universities are worth learning. Chinese universities should take a reform to distribute diverse course assessment methods in the whole process of teaching and give reasonable weight to each assessment method. However, there are many constraints on the reform of course assessment. Chinese universities should take comprehensive measures to break the constraints. The reform will promote teaching efficiency, help students form good study habits and develop right attitude toward exams, and
ultimately improve students' professional knowledge application ability, re-learning ability and employability.

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