



A Study on Curriculum Reform Strategy of British and American Literature for English Majors in China's Provincial Medical University

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Abstract: British and American Literature is one of the compulsory courses for English majors, which plays an indispensable role in cultivating students' foreign literature knowledge and literary appreciation competence, as well as improving students' comprehensive qualities such as humanistic quality and moral sentiment. This paper analyzes the status of British and American Literature by demonstrating the existing problems and their causes. On the viewpoints that English is a communication tool and literature is of no use, the academic study on foreign literature is weakened and the attentions students focus on literature courses become insufficient. In addition, under the principle of "integrative optimization" in adjusting Talents Training Program, the class hours of British and American Literature are gradually compressed. Taking the curriculum reform of British and American Literature in a provincial medical university as an example, this paper discusses ways to revise and adjust the Talent Training Program according to the National Standard (for Foreign Language and Literature Majors). Exploratory strategies on reforming the traditional training mode are put forward, which include setting up elective courses related to British and American Literature in the basic stage of English major cultivation, establishing literature-oriented learning communities and organizing literature-related activities in the innovation practice of quality development education. The strategies aim to perfect the curriculum system suitable for the provincial medical university, with the purpose of achieving the goal of talents training and meeting the new requirements of undergraduate education.

Key Words: provincial medical university, English majors, British and American Literature; curriculum reform

I. Introduction

After decades of vigorous development, China's higher education has entered a new stage of improving its ability to cultivate high-level talents. The Ministry of Education clearly puts undergraduate education in the core position of talent training. In 2018, China announced the National Standard for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate in Ordinary Colleges and Universities (for Foreign Language and Literature Majors) (abbreviated to "National Standard"), which clearly put forward that one of the training objectives of foreign language and literature majors is cultivating talents possessing good comprehensive quality, solid foreign language competence and relevant professional knowledge. In terms of knowledge requirements and capability requirements, the focus still remained on the foreign literature knowledge and literary appreciation ability, in addition to the basic foreign language knowledge and foreign language application ability. The cultivation of knowledge and ability related to foreign literature need to be achieved through core courses such as Foreign Literature and Comparative Literature^[1].

In view of the higher education undergraduate programmatic documents (for foreign language literature majors) issued in the past, the demands for students' cultural literacy or literature competence and emphasis on literature courses were fully

[Received 14 Dec 2022; Accepted 17 Dec 2022; Published (online) 31 Dec 2022]



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demonstrated. For example, according to the Teaching Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities (abbreviated as the Syllabus) issued in 2000, students were required to improve ideological and moral quality, cultural literacy and psychological quality, on the premise of mastering both English language skills and knowledge^[2]. As a compulsory course providing professional knowledge, British Literature was recommended to be offered in Semester 6 or 7. In addition, the Syllabus also included courses like American Literature, Introduction to Western Culture, British/American Society and Culture, History of British/American Literature, Selected English Fictions (Proses, Dramas, Poems) Reading into the list of elective courses, suggesting that colleges and universities choose the above mentioned courses according to the actual situation.

In August 2019, more than 50 experts and scholars attended the symposium on the Construction of New Liberal Arts in Colleges and Universities, discussing the connotation and development path of the construction of New Liberal Arts. Professor Ma Xiao from Southwestern University of Finance and Economics stated that “The fundamental task of the construction of New Liberal Arts is to optimize the curriculum system and cultivate students. It requires for strengthening moral education and cultivating talents, implementing quality education or general education, optimizing the curriculum system, and developing students’ interdisciplinary thinking and ability to solve complex problems.”^[3] In November of the same year, at the forum Literature Education and Research Method Innovation under the New Liberal Arts Background, Professor Wang Zhuo’s keynote speech stressed that it was an urgent task to review the positioning of English major and literature teaching, then reconstructed the literature curriculum system^[4]. It is obviously a pressing and challenging problem for colleges and universities to take the initiative to meet the strategic needs of English talents training in the new era. The Talents Training Programs need to be adjusted and the constructions of curriculum system, teaching materials, training platform and teaching model innovation demand actual implement. Colleges and universities should combine the development of local politics, economy and culture with the educational goals and the characteristics of themselves. When probing into paths and approaches suitable for curriculum system construction and teaching model innovation, the first thing to consider is the current status of British and American Literature.

II. Status of British and American Literature Courses

With the deepening development of China’s Reform and Opening up and the continuous improvement of its social, economic and cultural level, the positive roles of English in strengthening the communication between China and other countries and expanding the opening up to the outside world have attracted more and more people’s attention. English has become a crucial factor in talent selection, job hunting and promotion. English has been playing an increasingly important part in the hearts of Chinese people, and even triggered a craze of “Learning English for All” for a time. The scale of English education in China has been expanding and the quality has been improved. During this period, the Discipline Construction of English Language and Literature in China’s colleges and universities has made great achievements. However, the disadvantages behind the craze of learning English have gradually emerged, which have been questioned and criticized by all sides. For instance, British and American Literature is an the important pillar of Discipline of English Language and Literature. However, the teaching and development of British and American Literature in colleges and universities are facing more and more problems. The most prominent phenomena are listed as below.

Firstly, the academic researches on literature are weakened, and the characteristics of British and American Literature are gradually blurred. Literature teaching and learning have been included in the scope of language teaching and learning. When conducting scientific researches, writing thesis or guiding English majors’ graduation papers, the research directions of English teachers are more oriented to English teaching, translation or other directions related to students’ careers after graduation. The proportions of researches concerning literary theory, literature study and culture-related research are decreasing year by year. Secondly, the importance of literature courses is decreasing day by day, and the class hours of British and American Literature are gradually compressed. Take the Talents Training Programme (for English major) of Youjiang Medical University for Nationalities (YMUN, the provincial medical university where the author works) as an example. The British and American Literature is offered as a core program in the 5th and 6th semesters, with a total of 36+36 class hours. During the adjustment process of Talent Training Programs from 2013 to 2019, although the total number of British and American Literature classes had not been cut down, some required or elective courses related to literature and culture (such as Extensive English Reading, Western Culture Education and Introduction to Western Culture) had been reduced gradually and even deleted completely. Thirdly, influenced by the viewpoint that literature is useless, students no longer pay enough attention to the British and American Literature. Students cannot benefit from literature courses directly and quickly in terms of improving skills, obtaining high grade in examination or finding good jobs after graduation, hence draw a conclusion that

literature is useless. What's more, due to the reasons of having fewer class hours or improving students' interest in literature courses, some teachers take the shortcut of teaching abbreviated versions or watching movie adaptations instead of reading original literary classics. As a result, students believe that learning literature only requires mastering the plot of a novel, the writing characteristics of a writer and the representative works of a certain literary school. Therefore, the practical significance of reading literary works no longer exist, and the educational function that literature courses should play fail to take effect.

The causes for the above-mentioned problems can come down to the viewpoint that English is nothing but a communication tool. In the view of considering English as a tool, teachers give priority to language knowledge when teaching, with the only focus on the internal organization rules of the language system. The process of teaching and learning become test-oriented that centered on teacher's presentation of language forms (such as the meaning of words, syntactic deconstruction and the literal meaning of articles)^[5]. Therefore, students are put into the positions of passive learners while the main roles of teachers are merely providing appropriate input. Naturally, the class design will attach more importance to teacher's instruction rather than students' application of the language^[6]. The instrumentalism of language break the relationship between language, culture and society, which has a passive impact on language teaching and learning. Teachers put more emphasis on the training of skills rather than the development of cultural literary. They only focus on improving students' language application ability and neglect the development of students' social experience, cultural knowledge and humanistic spirit. This has undoubtedly influenced the function of language teaching in cultivating students' humanistic spirit in higher education.^[7]

III. Literature Review

Facing up with the problems, Chinese researchers have done a lot to seek solutions. Take researches conducted in the latest 10 years as examples, there are research papers on both classroom design and the construction of new teaching models. There are also discussions on the reform of the curriculum system in various colleges or universities. By defining and providing theoretical basis, Zeng (2012) put forward a new student-centered teaching model of British and American Literature. This study proposed that students are the main body of literature study while teachers should create teaching scenario actively, use diversified teaching methods (such as software, network, movie and TV drama, etc.) comprehensively so as to attract students to learn voluntarily. What's more, the proportion of essay questions in the course assessment should be increased for the purpose of evaluating students' ability to analyze literary works^[8].

Zhu & Liu (2015) took the topic selection and writing of graduation thesis of English major in a provincial medical college as cases to analyze the crux of curriculum setting and teaching of British and American Literature. The authors believed that the curriculum connotation of British and American Literature and its role in talents training should be fully understood. It was necessary to balance the setting of skills-training courses and humanities-developing courses. Suggestions of running British and American Literature in junior grades, and integrating literature course with basic courses like Intensive Reading, Extensive Reading, Writing or Translation are proposed, aiming to fulfill the task of cultivating students' literary literacy and improving their reading, writing and translation skills at the same time^[9]. The author's suggestions are good ways to solve the dilemma facing the course of British and American Literature. However, a coin has two sides. British and American Literature is a course traditionally offered in senior grades, whether the difficulty is acceptable to the majority of junior-grade students still remains to be discussed. What's more, the teaching mode of integrating literature courses with basic skill-training courses is still to be explored.

By comparing the teaching practices of the two grades of English major in a science and engineering college, Zeng & Lu (2018) introduced, analyzed and evaluated the specific reform measures of each teaching link. In terms of teaching contents, they put forward a new measure of combining introduction to literature and the literary history. In the aspect of teaching means and methods, the mixture of lofty content of literary works with the down-to-earth teaching language, the integration of films and TV dramas with literary texts, the blending of diversified learning monitoring into originality-based evaluation are recommended^[10]. This study provided some effective methods for the teaching of British and American Literature for English majors in science and engineering colleges.

Taking Zhangjiajie College of Jishou University as an example, Zhou (2019) analyzed the teaching status of British and American Literature in independent colleges, pointed out the existing problems, and put forward solutions, aiming to seek a new teaching model suitable for application-oriented talents training program. The university had adjusted the curriculum and adopted the model of combining compulsory courses with elective courses. In the freshman and sophomore semesters, History of Literature was offered as an elective course to help students sort out the development of British and American literature. In the third year, the core curriculum of British and American Literature would be offered, and the teaching would be divided

into four parts according to contents, namely poetry, prose, fiction and drama^[11]. This attempt broke the tradition of “taking literary history as the main line” and created a new teaching model of focusing on literary genre. It provided a beneficial trial for the dilemma of covering multiple teaching contents such as literary history, literary schools, text reading and analysis in limited class hours. However, memorizing the long history of British and American literature and the numerous literary schools with various characteristics is so difficult that whether it is suitable for students in the junior grades deserves suspicion. On the other hand, when some students took the elective literary history and some students didn't, should the compulsory course of British and American Literature in senior grades be offered in different classes? The author did not answer.

IV. Strategies of Curriculum Reforming

The setting of British and American Literature and literature-related courses for English majors is undoubtedly the result of the continuous adjustment of different colleges and universities in accordance with their own characteristics and educational objectives. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the current curriculum of British and American Literature can hardly meet the basic requirements of talents training and the needs of the national development strategy. Under the guidance of the National Standard and the background of New Liberal Arts Construction, it has become an urgent task to clarify the humanistic orientation of English majors and reform the curriculum construction of British and American Literature. This paper tries to take the English major of YJUN as an example, putting forward exploratory strategies on the curriculum construction of British and American Literature, aiming to meet the new national requirements of undergraduate education.

The author works in a provincial medical university, which has only been offering English majors training for more than 10 years. In terms of the revision and improvement of Talent Training Program, the local economic development, the orientation of education and the characteristics of medical university were all put into consideration during the process of the specialty construction. Two cultivation orientations, namely Medical English Translation and English Education, have been settled and strengthened, which fully reflect the advantages and the professional characteristics of a medical university for nationalities. However, under the principle of “adhering to the integrative optimization and giving students more time for independent learning”, as is mentioned above, although the total number of class hours of British and American Literature has not been reduced, some compulsory or elective courses related to literature or culture have been reduced to the point of overall deletion in the previous adjustment of Talent Training Programs. Such a situation is not conducive for students to master the literature knowledge and improve their literary appreciation ability and humanistic quality. It is to the disadvantages of realizing the goal of training talents with “international vision, language competence and cultural literacy”.

In the current Talents Training Program of YJUN, the curriculum platform mainly consists of four categories, namely General Education, Discipline Foundation, Professional Courses and Quality Development. Among them, General Education mainly covers ideological education, computer science, physical education, aesthetic education, labor education and other courses for students of all majors in the university. The class hours and credit requirements haven't changed much over the years. Under the guiding principle of “integrative optimization”, due to the addition of school-based compulsory Medical English and English education courses, the rooms for adjustment are really limited. Therefore, the reform of the curriculum system of British and American Literature can be carried out from the following aspects.

4.1 Correcting Misunderstanding

To promote the curriculum reform of British and American Literature, the first thing is to clarify the teaching purpose and the role it plays in the cultivation of English professionals, and to correct the misunderstanding that “literature is useless” held in the minds of students and even some teachers. What is the point of teaching literature? What should be the purpose of its teaching? Guo Yingjian, a professor at the School of Foreign Languages of Zhengzhou University, has discussed this issue and divided foreign language learning into four levels. The first is to learn its language, the most basic means of communication. The second is to learn its literature, not only the art of a country's language, but also the love and hate of its people and the pursuit of truth, kindness and beauty. Thirdly, learning its culture, understanding its philosophy, history, religion, music and art, which are helpful to strengthen the understanding of the foreign country and the communication between the people. The fourth and highest level is the study of human civilization^[12].

In the Syllabus (released in 2000), the purpose of British and American Literature is defined as cultivating students' ability to read, appreciate and understand the original English literature, and mastering the basic knowledge and methods of literary criticism. Through reading and analyzing British and American literary works, students' basic language skills and humanistic quality will be promoted, and their understanding of Western literature and culture will be enhanced^[2]. It can be seen that

British and American Literature and related courses are of great benefits to improving students' basic language skills and they reinforce each other. For instance, literary works of different genres and styles have their own norms or characteristics in writing, which help students gain an intuitive experience of complicated grammar rules and provide them with models to imitate. In the appreciation of a poem or a dramatic work, reading aloud or playing roles will undoubtedly benefit students' oral performance and help correct their pronunciation. If teachers properly introduce and apply western literary criticism theory when leading students to discuss the literary classic, it will open a window for students to improve their sensibility to literary works and promote critical thinking.

4.2 Optimizing Curriculum

Professor Cheng Aimin at Nanjing University noted, "Students' interest in British and American Literature should be developed from the moment they enter college. It's about the curriculum."^[13] When it comes to British and American Literature, it is obviously beyond the receptivity of first-year English majors from the provincial colleges or universities and goes against the law of teaching. However, some introductory courses related to literature can be regarded as good alternatives. Take the appreciation of movie or TV adaption of literary classics mentioned above as example, when using in the teaching process of British and American Literature in senior grads, it will replace the reading of literature works and occupy the limited class hours, which is indeed an act of skipping the point. However, when offered in the first or second grades, it will help students obtain an intuitive experience of the historical background, story plot, character depiction related to the literary works. The initial understanding of the students' may be relatively simple, but the learning experience at this period of time will undoubtedly reduce the students' fear of reading the original works and stimulate their interests in literature study. If teachers give proper guidance at this moment, some students will even be eager to borrow the books from the library. What is more important is the strong interest in the junior stage, combined with the 2-3 years of reading accumulation, will certainly reduce the obstacles for the students to learn English and American Literature in their senior grades. What's more, compared with ordinary science fiction blockbusters or soap operas, movies and TV series adapted from literary classics are meticulous in terms of the design of lines, the accent of the actors and even the way of dressing. The immersive audio-visual experience will be helpful for students' listening, pronunciation, oral training and even the accumulation of vocabulary, which plays a rewarding complementary role for the skills training courses in the basic stage of English majors. Therefore, it should be a beneficial exploration for the curriculum reform of British and American Literature to add literature-related courses to the list of elective courses.

4.3 Innovating Quality Development

The National Standards (issued in 2018) clearly stated the specific contents of Practical Education for English majors^[1]. Apart from the regular professional and social practice, innovation practice and international exchange are also included. As far as innovation practice is concerned, it is often simply interpreted as scientific and technological innovation practice (such as medical, science, engineering and the like), or commercial practice plan that produces actual economic benefits. In the process of developing the Talents Training Program (2019 edition), YMUN has placed the innovation practice education in the section of Quality Development. The credits required have increased from 7.5 points in the 2013 edition and 10.5 points in the 2016 edition to 22 points in 2019, which reflects the importance the university attach to conducting quality development and improving students' innovative competence. However, when it comes to specific operation, it is still limited to running regular innovation training or competition projects, and the content of projects still cannot jump out of the categories of "science, medical technology or commerce", which is really a misunderstanding towards innovation practice. As a matter of fact, innovation education should include but not limited to the contents mentioned above. The "National Standard" clearly stipulates that "the practice of innovation aims at cultivating students' ability of problem-solving, creativity or business startups. Scientific and feasible training plans should be designed and formulated including academic competitions, hobby groups, learning communities, innovation projects and other activities"^[1]. Therefore, setting up Literature Reading Groups or Literature Learning Communities and starting literature-related academic competitions would be regarded as practical and feasible measures for innovation education specific for English majors.

Quality Development is mainly carried out in extracurricular time, holidays, winter and summer vacations, and does not occupy classroom teaching time. Reading groups or learning communities with the themes of "British/American poetry appreciation", "British/American novel reading" or "British/American drama interpretation", etc. can be established according to students' interests, talents or comprehensive competence. The groups or communities can be set up by students, in order to develop their interpersonal skills, organizational skills and coordinated abilities. Under the guidance of teachers, students should formulate learning contents, study plans and presentation of results so as to fully exercise their ability of problem-solving and independent learning. During the process, teachers play the role of instructor or facilitator. At the

beginning of learning, teachers may recommend reading list according to the directions of students' researches and interests. Meanwhile, teacher should timely answer questions and counseling to solve the problems and puzzles encountered by students. Finally, professional opinions and pertinent evaluations should be given to students according to their performances and directions for further studies should be pointed out at the same time. The learning process and evaluation methods should be innovative and diversified. Reading notes, essay writing, poetry or drama translation, poetry and fiction reading contest, movie and TV drama dubbing contest, drama sketch performance, and the like, are good methods to choose. They are also opportunities for students to exercise and demonstrate their comprehensive proficiency in applying English. The members of reading groups and learning communities do not necessarily be limited to English majors, students of all majors, whoever interested in British and American Literature, should be attracted to take a part in. After all, English majors are negligible in quantity in most of the provincial medical colleges or universities. This can enrich the extra-curriculum activities, create an English learning atmosphere, motivating students of all majors actively participate in English learning

V. Limitation of Study

Taking the curriculum reform of British and American Literature as an example, this paper discusses how to revise and adjust the Talent Training Program according to the National Standard (for Foreign Language and Literature Majors), puts forwards strategies on reforming the traditional training mode and creating new mode suitable for the growth needs of students'. Due to the limitation of space, the author haven't discussed the specific operation mode of elective course or innovative practice in detail. For instance, how to regulate the difficulty of film clips and how to design the tasks after watching movies so as to meet the acceptability of freshmen and sophomores? When literature-oriented reading groups carry out quality-oriented activities, teacher's guidance should not be restricted to answering questions online. More effective "online + offline" guidance platform (or model) should be created to help students benefit from the projects. The above problems remain to be further explored and discussed by researchers.

VI. Epilogue

Teaching Guide for Undergraduate of Foreign Language and Literature Majors (2020) pointed out that English Literature is one of the five major directions of English ^[14]. Therefore, due attention should be granted to literature-related courses in colleges and universities. Under the premise of offering compulsory courses, the curriculum system of British and American Literature should be reformed reasonably. This paper takes the adjustment of Talent Training Program in a provincial medical university as example, puts forward exploratory strategies. First of all, setting up elective courses related to British and American Literature in the basic stage of English major cultivation can solve the problem of students' lack of interest, and play a guiding and path-paving role in the improvement stage. In addition, in the part of quality development education, the innovation practice related to British and American Literature not only solves the problem of insufficient class hours but also provides students with opportunities to exercise their English proficiency and improve their independent learning ability. It should be pointed out that the above elective courses and innovative practice can only serve as useful supplements to the formal British and American Literature courses, and cannot replace their role and status in talent training. British and American Literature in the improvement stage of English major training should maintain the original depth and breadth, and fulfill its task in the cultivation of cultural literacy, ideological and political education. On the construction of British and American Literature curriculum system and innovation of teaching model, further researches are needed. On the premise of meeting the requirements of "National Standards", the misunderstanding towards literature courses should be fundamentally reversed, some adjustments should be made according to the actual situation of colleges and universities and then put into practice.

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