

Operational Problems and Countermeasures of Public Elective Courses in Higher Vocational Colleges and Universities Based on the Perspective of Academic Affairs Management: Taking Guangdong C Vocational College as an Example

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Abstract: With the vigorous development of higher vocational education, public elective courses, as one of the core components of the higher vocational curriculum system, occupy a pivotal position. Based on the perspective of academic affairs management and taking Guangdong C Vocational College as an example, this paper meticulously analyzes the operational problems in the declaration, setting, teaching, and management of public elective courses through questionnaire surveys and other methods. It also puts forward a series of targeted solutions, with a view to continuously improving the teaching quality and management level of public elective courses.

Keywords: Academic affairs management; Public elective courses; Operational problems; Countermeasures; Higher vocational colleges and universities

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1. Introduction

Public elective courses are an indispensable part of the talent cultivation plan and curriculum system of higher vocational colleges and universities. They are also an important supplement to the compulsory courses, which are designed to encourage students to expand the field of knowledge, optimize the structure of knowledge and ability, and improve their learning, practical, and innovative abilities, so as to enhance their employment competitiveness. The Ministry of Education's Guidance on the Formulation and Implementation of Professional Talent Cultivation Programs in Vocational Colleges and Universities, issued in 2019, clearly states that the teaching hours of elective courses in higher vocational colleges and universities should account for no less than 10% of the total teaching hours, and that comprehensive quality elective courses focusing on humanistic literacy and scientific quality education should be offered in accordance with the provisions of the relevant documents.

However, in the actual operation process, public elective courses often have many problems such as unreasonable curriculum, irregular teaching management, and lack of teaching faculty, which seriously affects the teaching quality and effect of public elective courses. This study takes Guangdong C Vocational College as an example, analyzes the problems in the operation of public elective courses from the perspective of teaching management, and puts forward a series of targeted solutions, with a view to providing guidelines and references for similar colleges and universities, and continuously improving the teaching quality and management level of public elective courses.

2. Problems in the operation of public elective courses in higher vocational colleges and universities

2.1. Inadequate review of course curriculum and lack of unified planning

Similar to most higher vocational colleges and universities, the declaration and audit procedure of public elective courses in this university is that the Academic Affairs Office will issue the number of courses to be offered and the number of students with pre-set demands to each secondary school, and then the secondary school will forward the notification of the task to the teachers; there is no hard target for the secondary school, and both full-time and part-time teachers are free to make declarations; the secondary school will submit a simple review and summary of the declaration materials to the Academic Affairs Office for final approval. However, considering the limited declaration of public courses on campus, coupled with the wide range of fields involved, the shortage of auditing manpower, and the difficulty of having a professional match, the final approval procedures and standards have been relaxed. Generally, as long as teachers make a declaration, the Academic Affairs Office will approve it ^[1].

In the talent cultivation program of each major of the university, there is a column for public courses. However, due to the lack of unified planning, the scope of its opening greatly depends on the current teacher's declaration of courses, so the column is mostly blank. Teachers often offer public courses based on their own professional expertise, interests, or availability. This can result in a greater degree of arbitrariness in the offerings each semester, leading to an imbalance and lack of a well-rounded distribution structure within the course categories ^[2].

From the course offerings in the past years, the uneven distribution of course types is obvious, with more courses cultivating practical skills and relaxing entertainment, and fewer courses cultivating students' innovative, scientific, and humanistic spirits. From the results of the student satisfaction questionnaire, 1.56% are very satisfied, 1.34% are satisfied, 26.33% are average, 39.73% are dissatisfied, and 31.04% are very dissatisfied, indicating that students are not satisfied with the structure of the public elective courses.

2.2. Lack of appropriate teaching operation management

2.2.1. Differences in teachers' quality

In order to ensure the number of public elective courses offered, the university encourages all teaching staff with teaching qualifications to offer various courses. This leads to the complexity of the composition of the teaching team, professional teachers, teaching assistants, administrative commissioners, management staff, etc., their qualifications, titles, and teaching levels vary, and most of them have a large number of professional teaching tasks or administrative work. Therefore, it is difficult to put sufficient time and effort into preparing and researching for public elective courses, resulting in challenges in ensuring teaching quality ^[3].

2.2.2. Lack of teaching quality management

The management of the teaching and research organization is vacant. Public elective courses are taught by

a diverse group of teachers, offering a broad range of subjects. However, there is no dedicated teaching and research organization to review lecture content or conduct teaching and research activities. As a result, teachers work in isolation, and there is a lack of effective quality monitoring for key teaching indicators such as course materials, syllabi, lecture notes, teaching ability, and evaluation methods.

Other than that, there is a lack of monitoring of teaching order. To prioritize professional courses and accommodate the potential teaching schedules of public course instructors, most public elective course classes are scheduled after the second class in the afternoon or in the evening. However, by this time, most teaching management staff or supervisors have already finished their workday, creating a gap in monitoring teaching order. In the absence of supervision, if a teacher fails to maintain classroom discipline, it can easily lead to issues such as low attendance, a dull atmosphere, and scattered discipline ^[4].

In addition, public elective courses often feature a wide range of flexible teaching methods and typically receive less oversight, resulting in minimal intervention from supervisors. Consequently, teachers may have excessive autonomy in managing these courses, leading to issues such as arbitrary cancellation or rescheduling of classes, deviation from the syllabus or teaching plan, outdated or disorganized content, and an over-reliance on theoretical instruction while neglecting practical applications. Instances of teachers playing videos during class or controlling the course content unilaterally also occur frequently ^[5]. Some instructors, in their effort to fulfill teaching requirements by offering public courses, fail to maintain course quality, thereby falling short of meeting students' diverse learning needs.

2.3. Inadequate program publicity and guidance for students

2.3.1. Poor sharing of information in the course selection process

Insufficient publicity investment in public elective courses leads to students often blindly selecting courses based on the course name or teacher reputation, with a lack of comprehensive understanding of the course content, teaching methods, course requirements, and so on. This information asymmetry leads to blindness and arbitrariness in course selection, which affects the effectiveness of course selection. Some students think that the content and teaching methods do not meet their expectations after starting the course, and some of them will even apply for withdrawal from the course ^[6].

2.3.2. Excessive cost of students' course selection

The Academic Affairs Office of the university stipulates that students can only enroll in or withdraw from a course during the course selection period, and no changes will be accepted once the course officially starts. This undoubtedly increases the cost of course selection for students. In order to avoid making mistakes, many students prefer to choose teachers and courses that they think they are familiar with. This, in turn, leads to a full enrolment of some popular teachers or courses with more interesting names, while the enrolment of some teachers with low popularity and courses with moderate names does not even reach the minimum standard for the opening of a class, forming a distinct phenomenon of uneven distribution of teaching resources.

3. Optimization strategies for the operation and management of public elective courses in higher vocational colleges and universities

3.1. Forming ideological consensus and planning the course system

Colleges should attach great importance to the construction of public elective courses, incorporate public elective courses into the overall teaching planning of colleges, clarify its positioning and function, and widely solicit opinions from teachers and students through the convening of symposiums, seminars, and other forms,

so as to form a consensus on the importance of public elective courses. On this basis, it is important to develop a scientific and reasonable curriculum system planning for public elective courses and clarify the criteria for opening courses, course objectives, course content, course requirements, etc., to ensure the standardization and effectiveness of the opening of public elective courses.

3.2. Strengthening organizational management and implementing talent cultivation

3.2.1. Establishing teaching and research organizations for public elective courses and improving course recognition

A special teaching and research organization is established for public elective courses, responsible for the planning, approval, supervision, and evaluation of public elective courses. The organization regularly organizes teaching and research activities and teaching seminars, strengthens exchanges and cooperation among teachers, improves course identity and teaching quality, actively collects and analyses students' feedback, and continuously optimizes the curriculum and teaching content ^[7]. At the same time, teachers are encouraged to participate in the development of talent training programs that highlight the school's characteristics, prepare school-based teaching materials, and form the institution's characteristic and high-quality courses.

3.2.2. Improving the quality management mode of public courses and strict teaching order

The first step is to implement the course access system. It is important to establish strict course access standards, conduct strict auditing and evaluation of the public elective courses declared for opening, and ensure novel course content, reasonable structure, and scientific teaching methods. The second step is to strengthen teaching supervision. A teaching supervision group is established to regularly update and evaluate the public elective courses, so as to find and solve the problems in teaching in time. The third step is to improve the student feedback mechanism. A multi-channel student feedback platform is established to encourage students to actively participate in course evaluation and collect students' opinions through questionnaires and symposiums. The fourth step is to implement teaching quality accountability. For courses with low teaching quality and student satisfaction, timely measures are taken to rectify or suspend the courses, and the relevant teachers are held accountable ^[8].

3.3. Enhancing the guidelines for public course selection and reducing the cost of wrong selection

3.3.1. Improving course selection guidelines

Detailed course selection guidelines are made, including course introduction, teacher profiles, course objectives, teaching content, teaching methods, assessment methods, and other key information, to help students fully understand the course and reduce the phenomenon of blind selection due to asymmetric information. At the same time, course selection information is widely released through the campus network, WeChat public account, and other channels to improve the accessibility and transparency of information.

3.3.2. Enhancing the satisfaction of course selection

To enhance course selection satisfaction, the enrollment or withdrawal time for public elective courses should be extended to two weeks after the start of classes. During the two-week period, students can field-test and experience different public elective courses. They are allowed to enroll in or withdraw from courses according to their interests and needs. Extending the enrollment in or withdrawal from the course will be "market-oriented." Teachers "sell" their courses to students, which in turn will greatly encourage teachers to take the initiative to understand the interests and needs of students, and constantly optimize and upgrade the course content and

teaching mode.

3.4. Strengthening the basic construction of public courses to enhance the effect of educating people

3.4.1. Promoting multi-party liaison and cultivating innovative teachers

Colleges need to strengthen cooperation and communication with industries and enterprises and encourage teachers of public elective courses to participate in social practice and scientific research projects to broaden their horizons and update their knowledge. At the same time, colleges establish a teacher training mechanism and organize regular teaching seminars and workshops to enhance teachers' teaching skills and innovation ability. In addition, colleges can introduce off-campus experts, scholars, and industry professionals as part-time teachers or visiting professors, bringing fresh perspectives and vitality to public elective courses ^[9].

3.4.2. Enhancing the construction of public elective courses to adapt to students' diverse needs

Based on students' diverse learning needs, the curriculum system of public elective courses is constantly enriched and improved. Interdisciplinary and interprofessional course modules, such as innovation and entrepreneurship, humanistic literacy, international vision, etc., can be added to meet the needs of students' comprehensive development. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the timeliness and practicality of the course content, timely update the teaching content and methods, and ensure that the courses are closely connected with social development.

3.5. Innovating the assessment and evaluation mechanism of public elective courses

3.5.1. Implementing diversified assessment mechanisms for public elective courses

Colleges should break the single examination and evaluation method and establish a diversified assessment and evaluation system. In addition to the traditional closed-book examination, a variety of assessment forms such as project work, group discussion, oral report, practical operation, and so on can be introduced to comprehensively evaluate students' learning achievements and skills. At the same time, it focuses on the combination of process evaluation and result evaluation and emphasizes students' learning attitude, method, and learning progress ^[10].

3.5.2. Optimizing the teaching evaluation system of public elective courses

Colleges should establish a scientific and fair teaching evaluation system to ensure the objectivity and effectiveness of teaching quality evaluation. Peer evaluation, student evaluation, self-evaluation, and other evaluation methods are introduced to form a multi-dimensional and multi-perspective evaluation system. At the same time, a teaching quality feedback mechanism should be established, where evaluation results are promptly communicated to both the teachers and the relevant departments. This allows for targeted suggestions and guidance, helping teachers improve their teaching methods and overall course quality.

4. Conclusion and prospects

In summary, there are indeed many challenges in the operation of public elective courses in higher vocational colleges and universities, but in-depth analysis and corresponding optimization strategies through the perspective of teaching management can effectively improve the teaching quality and management level of public elective courses. As a typical case, the experience and practice of Guangdong C Vocational College provide useful references and learning for similar institutions. In the future, with the deepening of education reform and the continuous development of higher vocational education, the construction of public elective

courses in higher vocational colleges will usher in a broader development space and opportunities. We look forward to contributing wisdom and strength to cultivate more high-quality and highly skilled applied talents through continuous exploration and practice.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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