

The Exploration and Practice of Constructing the Curriculum Cluster for Japanese (Teacher-oriented) Majors Under the Drive of Certification

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Abstract: Course teaching is the foundation of certification for Teacher-oriented programs, and it's also an important component of the current reform in university-level Japanese language Teacher-oriented programs. Curriculum clusters have been widely applied in the teaching reform practices of relevant majors at universities due to their characteristics such as high integration of course contents, rich practical teaching elements and adaptability to professional development demands. To further integrate the curriculum cluster with Japanese (Teacher-oriented) programs, efforts are needed to adjust course outlines and optimize teaching content, emphasizing teaching guidance and shifting teaching paradigms, improving teaching methods and upgrading teaching models.

Keywords: Teacher training certification; Curriculum clusters construction; Japanese (Teacher-oriented)

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1. Introduction

To comprehensively implement the government's educational policies, cultivate a team of high-quality teachers and staff, and effectively guarantee and improve the quality of Teacher-oriented in normal universities, the Ministry of Education issued the "Interim Measures for the Implementation of Accreditation of Normal University Majors in General Higher Education Institutions" in 2017 ^[1]. Since then, the accreditation work for normal university majors in China has been systematically classified and carried out in an orderly manner. Professional accreditation focuses on cultivating teachers' abilities and monitoring and evaluating Teacher-oriented quality from multiple dimensions and perspectives. Curriculum is the foundation of professional talent cultivation and the core element of professional development. Curriculum teaching is the basic link of professional accreditation for normal university majors, and the establishment of teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching methods, and teaching evaluation plays a crucial foundational role in accreditation ^[2]. Therefore, launching a new round of teaching reform around the accreditation of normal university majors has

become an inevitable trend ^[3].

On the other hand, with the continuous development of globalization and the increasingly close connections between countries, education options have become more diverse. Since 2000, China has gradually included various non-common languages in the unified national college entrance examination (Gaokao). Due to factors such as regional, cultural, and economic influences, coupled with the relatively quick learning process and the large potential for score improvement compared to English, as well as the increasing demand for studying abroad, Japanese has become the preferred choice for many candidates. Since 2016, the number of candidates taking the national Japanese exam has increased from less than 10,000 to around 250,000 in 2022, showing explosive growth rates of close to 100% to 200% annually ^[4]. However, compared to the rapid growth of Japanese language candidates, the number of teachers who can adapt to secondary school Japanese teaching trends, possess corresponding professional qualifications and hold relevant certificates is far from meeting the current demand. The reason for this lies in the fact that most undergraduate institutions have not yet shifted traditional Japanese language education from focusing on “Business-oriented talent” to “Teacher-oriented talent.” Therefore, the top priority of the current reform of Japanese language majors in normal universities should be on developing ways to accelerate the construction of Japanese language professional Teacher-oriented courses under the background of teacher certification and promote the cultivation of Japanese language Teacher-oriented talents. With this background, this paper aims to explore new paths for the development of Japanese (Teacher-oriented) majors under new situations and requirements by constructing subject curriculum clusters against the background of relevant teacher certification policies of the Ministry of Education.

2. Overview of curriculum clusters construction

The construction of curriculum clusters aims to closely link logically related disciplines and subjects, integrate them accordingly, reduce redundant repetition between courses, and thereby improve classroom teaching efficiency and student learning time utilization.

2.1. Basic concepts of Curriculum clusters

The concept of curriculum clusters was first proposed by foreign scholars. Canadian scholar Bereiter SM emphasized the importance of Curriculum clusters, considering them as the integration of related courses to achieve the fusion of knowledge between courses through the construction of different knowledge, thereby improving learners’ learning efficiency. His research pointed out the core goals of Curriculum clusters: to optimize the relationship between courses, eliminate redundant overlapping content, make teaching more targeted, and promote bidirectional promotion between teaching and learning ^[5]. American scholar Linn MC also expressed similar views on Curriculum clusters, emphasizing that university courses should not be isolated but holistic. Integrating related course content can enhance learners’ understanding of relevant knowledge and enhance their comprehensive practical abilities ^[6]. In China, research on the concept of curriculum clusters began in the 1990s. Wang J *et al.* proposed that the construction of curriculum clusters should aim to optimize teaching as a whole, emphasizing the connection and integration between courses ^[7]. Yang S further supplemented the theoretical significance of Curriculum clusters, believing that curriculum clusters are organic curriculum systems composed of logically related, similar, or closely related courses, mainly reorganized and constructed around a subject or research subject ^[8]. In summary, the construction of curriculum clusters aims to optimize the relationship between courses, eliminate redundant overlapping content, make teaching more targeted, and promote bidirectional promotion between teaching and learning ^[9]. By constructing curriculum clusters, the school’s curriculum system can be optimized to some extent, reducing the academic burden and

further cultivating the interdisciplinary abilities of Japanese (Teacher-oriented) majors.

2.2. Current status of Japanese (Teacher-oriented) major curriculum clusters construction

Since the Ministry of Education issued the “Interim Measures for the Implementation of Accreditation of Normal University Majors in General Higher Education Institutions” in 2017, the accreditation work for normal university majors in China has been systematically classified and carried out, focusing on the cultivation of teachers’ abilities, and monitoring and evaluating the quality of Teacher-oriented from multiple dimensions and perspectives has become an important task for accreditation ^[10]. However, as things stand, although talent training models and disciplinary frameworks for Japanese (Teacher-oriented) majors have been formed, there are still many aspects that need further exploration and practice due to their late start and relative lack of experience ^[11].

According to the “Interim Measures for the Implementation of Accreditation of Normal University Majors in General Higher Education Institutions,” accreditation must be centered on “students, follow the laws of teacher growth and development, allocate educational resources around teachers and organize courses and implement teaching centered on teachers” ^[12]. Currently, various universities in China offering Japanese (Teacher-oriented) majors generally divide their curriculum into three categories: general education Curriculum Cluster, professional education Curriculum Cluster, and Teacher-oriented Curriculum Cluster. Among them, the Teacher-oriented Curriculum Cluster include not only theoretical courses in education but also professional courses and pedagogy, as well as teacher skill training courses and comprehensive education courses for secondary schools. On the one hand, the theoretical and numerous education courses offered at the undergraduate stage occupy a lot of students’ time, leading to reduced learning interest. On the other hand, the breadth of curriculum design is mainly aimed at allowing students to master relevant teaching knowledge and skills systematically, but it neglects students’ own interests and cannot form a healthy knowledge structure, thereby limiting students’ development of exploratory thinking ^[13]. Therefore, it is particularly necessary to construct a new Curriculum Cluster that integrates theory and practice with the characteristics of Japanese (Teacher-oriented) disciplines.

3. Basic characteristics of Japanese (Teacher-oriented) major Curriculum Construction

This study focuses on improving the comprehensive quality of full-time Japanese (Teacher-oriented) undergraduate students and explores the establishment of a Curriculum Cluster for Japanese (Teacher-oriented) majors with “Japanese Curriculum Teaching Theory” as the main course and “Design of Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Teaching,” “Research on Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Standards and Textbooks,” and “Design and Production of Japanese Micro-lessons” as supplementary courses.

3.1. High degree of cross-integration between courses, the innovative course formats

This Curriculum Cluster selects “Japanese Curriculum Teaching Theory” as the core course to lay a solid theoretical foundation for students. Simultaneously, it selects “Design of Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Teaching” and “Research on Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Standards and Textbooks,” which are closely related to the core course, as the expansion of theoretical knowledge to avoid overlap in the courses. This approach creates new perspectives for students’ understanding, stimulates their curiosity about teaching content, and innovatively engages them in learning. “Design and Production of Japanese Micro-lessons” is an extension of the core course in the Curriculum clusters. Building upon a solid theoretical

foundation, it organically integrates theoretical knowledge with teaching practice, enriching the presentation of the curriculum and injecting vitality into purely theoretical courses. This approach prevents students from losing interest due to outdated content or repetitive theoretical knowledge, thus meeting students' knowledge needs and conforming to the laws of educational development.

Through the construction of the Curriculum clusters, the knowledge structure between related courses is reorganized according to teaching objectives, effectively reducing the redundancy of teaching content, increasing the utilization of teaching hours and shifting teaching from knowledge-oriented to skill-oriented and quality-oriented, thus innovating the talent training model for the new era.

3.2. Integration of theoretical teaching and practical teaching, the enrichment of teaching activities

By establishing a focus Curriculum Cluster with “Japanese Curriculum Teaching Theory” as the core course and “Design of Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Teaching,” “Research on Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Standards and Textbooks,” and “Design and Production of Japanese Micro-lessons” as supporting and expanding courses, the aim is to integrate theoretical knowledge teaching with practical skill teaching, focus more on student classroom participation, and enhance the final knowledge dissemination and student information reception. Professors can utilize a variety of online resources effectively, integrate multimedia teaching, classroom discussions, practical case studies, and group or individual presentations into the teaching process, and actively change the direction of classroom activities.

Teachers can consolidate students' understanding of knowledge through practical case studies, discussion and express their opinions on the questions raised in class. For example, “Design and Production of Japanese Micro-lessons” is comprehensive training for students' teaching practice abilities based on other courses in the Curriculum clusters, while “Design of Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Teaching” combines theoretical knowledge, teaching practice, and teaching research. It enriches “Japanese Curriculum Teaching Theory” and “Research on Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Standards and Textbooks” and provides practical guidance for “Design and Production of Japanese Micro-lessons,” forming a complementary and interconnected relationship among the four courses.

3.3. Meeting learners' professional development needs, significant learning effects

The structured content, diversified teaching methods and enriched teaching activities can better meet students' practical needs and provide more choices in the classroom. Innovative classroom formats play a significant role in stimulating students' curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. Each course in the curriculum clusters has its own focus and characteristics. “Japanese Curriculum Teaching Theory” focuses on cultivating students' theoretical knowledge to achieve the objectives of teacher training better. “Design of Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Teaching” and “Research on Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Standards and Textbooks” integrate theoretical knowledge with practical content and have a broader scope. “Design and Production of Japanese Micro-lessons” further refine the standards and requirements for students' teaching practice, effectively cultivating and improving students' teaching practice abilities and scientific inquiry literacy. Constructing curriculum clusters with clear structure and logic between courses can meet learners' practical needs and interests, positively promote students' self-development, and avoid problems caused by repetitive course settings and insufficient focus on individual student cultivation. Currently, China has entered a new stage of social development, and there is an urgent need for new productive forces. Education as an important source of new productive forces, plays a crucial role^[14].

4. Approaches to the construction of Japanese (Teacher-oriented) major curriculum clusters

The construction of the Japanese (Teacher-oriented) major curriculum clusters mainly revolves around the goals of talent training in this major, optimizing teaching content, teaching forms, and methods through teaching reform, besides aiming to achieve more with less effort.

4.1. Adjust teaching outlines and optimize teaching content

The four courses within the curriculum clusters need to adjust the outlines and teaching content arrangements reasonably according to the actual situation, ensuring effective connection and mutual promotion between courses. To address the existing problems in classroom learning, the approach is to integrate the knowledge structure and teaching content of the curriculum clusters under the guidance of the overall competency training objectives, optimize course arrangements, innovate teaching methods and enable students to grasp theoretical knowledge while improving practical skills.

In terms of teaching content, each course in the curriculum clusters should have a clear division of labor, retaining its key points and characteristics while complementing each other within the group. For example, “Japanese Curriculum Teaching Theory” and “Research on Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Standards and Textbooks” focus on theoretical teaching, emphasizing students’ acquisition and application of conceptual knowledge, principles, and methods. “Design of Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Teaching” integrates theoretical knowledge about educational teaching into the first two courses, emphasizing the cultivation of teaching practice skills behind strategies and methods. “Design and Production of Japanese Micro-lessons” combines theoretical knowledge and teaching practice based on the said three courses, forming a complete, orderly and rational course system.

4.2. Emphasize teaching guidance and transform teaching philosophy

Teaching guidance by teachers plays a crucial role in students’ development. Teachers need to guide students to establish interdisciplinary awareness and coordinate the relationship between theory and practice ^[15]. Additionally, teachers should guide students to read and master relevant course knowledge besides sending learning materials to students for preview or consolidation of knowledge using relevant information means. Furthermore, teaching is a process, and even outside the classroom, teachers should actively guide students to discover teaching materials around them and explore the theoretical factors within them.

These four courses, “Japanese Curriculum Teaching Theory,” “Design of Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Teaching,” “Research on Secondary School Japanese Curriculum Standards and Textbooks,” and “Design and Production of Japanese Micro-lessons,” each have their own characteristics and teaching structures. While each course has its own features and style of teaching, the overall objectives of these courses are consistent and there are overlaps in teaching methods and content. Therefore, teachers need to change their original teaching philosophies, design new comprehensive practical teaching programs that are consistent with the curriculum clusters teaching, focus on cultivating students’ teaching practice abilities, further optimize the practical teaching system of the curriculum clusters and maximize meeting learners’ needs.

4.3. Change teaching methods and upgrade teaching modes

To cultivate high-level Japanese (Teacher-oriented) undergraduate students for the new era, teachers must change their lecture-based teaching strategies. They need to gradually improve their existing classroom teaching modes, methods and strategies by exploring paths that organically combine theory and practice.

Firstly, case-based teaching should be strengthened. Teaching knowledge in the classroom should not be

indoctrination. Under the new curriculum standards, classrooms need more student participation in interaction based on teacher lectures. Secondly, teachers should leverage the advantages of digital media teaching. The use of digital media can turn boring texts into interesting audiovisual content, further enhancing students' attention in the classroom. Teachers can select appropriate digital media materials and use them in the classroom to deepen students' understanding of the text, improve students' autonomous learning and enrich teaching methods. Thirdly, teachers can carry out the construction and use of online and offline second classrooms. Through the second classroom, integrated teaching of English teaching, theoretical teaching, and practice can be achieved. For example, using online facilities such as multiple learning platforms available, students can follow People's Daily (Japanese version), People's China, and China Education Daily WeChat public accounts to obtain the latest information on Japanese and educational teaching, keep themselves updated and enhancing the openness of teaching.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the construction of curriculum clusters for Japanese (Teacher-oriented) majors is a proactive exploration and response to current educational challenges and issues. By optimizing the relationships between courses and reducing content repetition, teaching efficiency can be enhanced, student interest can be stimulated, and Japanese teacher candidates with greater practical and interdisciplinary abilities can be nurtured. However, to achieve effective development of the curriculum clusters, further adjustments to the curriculum, optimization of teaching content, changes in teaching methods, and integration of teaching resources are necessary to ensure the cohesion and mutual promotion of courses. It is hoped that through the construction of the curriculum clusters, new pathways can be opened up for the development of Japanese (Teacher-oriented) majors in China, making positive contributions to the cultivation of high-quality Japanese teaching teams.

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