
Analysis of Learning Habits of China's Undergraduates from the Perspective of Compulsory Courses

Sai Ma^{1,*}, Xing Zeng², Zigen Li³, Yanrong Li⁴

¹Office of Education Quality Evaluation & Supervision, Communication University of China, Beijing, China

²School of Journalism, Communication University of China, Beijing, China

³Beijing Dublin International College, Beijing University of Technology, Beijing, China

⁴Department of Laboratory & Equipment Management, Communication University of China, Beijing, China

Email address:

saima96@163.com (Sai Ma)

*Corresponding author

To cite this article:

Sai Ma, Xing Zeng, Zigen Li, Yanrong Li. Analysis of Learning Habits of China's Undergraduates from the Perspective of Compulsory Courses. *Higher Education Research*. Vol. 6, No. 6, 2021, pp. 195-206. doi: 10.11648/j.her.20210606.18

Received: November 9, 2021; **Accepted:** December 6, 2021; **Published:** December 24, 2021

Abstract: In the context of economic globalization, higher education pays more and more attention to the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents. Changing the inappropriate part of traditional teaching methods has become a challenge that China's higher education must handle to maintain its competitiveness in the new era. Covid-19 makes the combination of online and offline teaching become the norm, which will also raise higher requirements for undergraduates' learning self-discipline. This paper analyses the learning habits of undergraduates in China's higher education institutions. Compulsory courses account for a large proportion of the curriculum, and they are the learning tasks that must be completed during undergraduate stage, and their credits directly corresponding to the classroom learning time, which can indicate some learning situations of undergraduate. The statistical data were collected from a comprehensive university, and its training disciplines were divided into five cases. The average weekly fixed class workload of undergraduates was obtained through the credits of compulsory courses in each case for many grades. The reasons for the formation of undergraduates learning status and the influence of learning quality were interpreted by the combination of the survey data with the corresponding teachers' comments. The weakness of active learning consciousness of China's undergraduates is mainly related to the learning habits formed under long-term exam-oriented education. In addition, teachers' sense of responsibility plays a core role in the learning outcomes of undergraduates. At present, the concern of China's higher education is gradually shifting from teaching to learning, focusing on the cultivation of undergraduates' interest in their majors and independent learning ability after class.

Keywords: Compulsory Courses, Class Contact Hours, Workload, Independent Learning

1. Introduction

In the end of 1990s, with the globalization of economy, culture and other fields, China's higher education embraced a large-scale expansion of enrolment, and embarked on the internationally recognized path of massification, meanwhile, it was a shift to a more consumer-driven and managerialist environment [19]. In order to ensure the international academic competitiveness, China has successively implemented "211 Project" and "985 Program" since 1990s [9]. In the "211 Project", the government invested in improving the research facilities of 100 key universities in

21st century. In the "985 Program", the Ministry of Education (MOE) has provided extra supports for 39 top universities, just like Peking University and Tsinghua University, to pursuit international reputation. As a result, many colleges and institutions were merged for the purpose of establishing research-oriented and comprehensive universities [8]. As far as higher education was concerned, it is necessary to complete the transformation from "traditional education" (based on the disciplinary knowledge and transmission) to a competence-based education required by the global job market and the new society of knowledge [2]. Therefore, the government determined interdisciplinary development

strategy to achieve the latest goal of “Double World-Class Project”¹. In a word, education reform has been accompanied by the progression of China’s Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and it comprises any planned changes in the way HEIs system functions, from teaching methodologies to administrative processes, in which the setting of syllabus and curriculum design are the important parts. The ultimate purpose of these procedures is to improve students’ academic performance and the quality of higher education. Currently, the learning habits of undergraduates have become a concern.

From the point of the curriculum structure, compulsory courses account for a large proportion in China [18]. This paper makes statistics on the classroom time of compulsory courses in different disciplines, which is the objective situation of the distribution of undergraduates’ daily learning workload, and explores insights for these learning status through interviews. Learning time is the premise of learning outcomes, and it is a natural reflection of learning habits. In addition to considering the characteristics of disciplines and majors, the syllabus and curriculum system also need to refer to the learning habits of undergraduates. China’s higher education continues to confront new ideas, the reasons for reshaping undergraduates’ independent and active learning habits and the encountered problems during these process will be conducted.

2. Literature Review

The workload of student has been a conventional issue, involving curriculum construction, teaching method, learning approach, the effectiveness of teaching-learning environment [25], and all aspects of the whole operation that will have consequences. Generally, workload can be explained as the scheduled class contact hours plus independent studies for understanding and finish assignments [7], in addition, it consists of the inherent difficulty of the work, the institutional factors and student motivation and effort [3]. In the conventional teaching behavior, some disciplines present special requirements, and it is hard to reach an agreement on instructional pacing, so teachers need to negotiate with each other and adjust course contents accordingly, so as to reduce the workload of students and make them more interested and enthusiasm to learn [6]. Besides, it is a prerequisite that teaching strategies should be chosen based on the knowledge of student diversity, and appropriate approaches are likely to enable many students to realize their potentials [39], and then some student support services should be done, including clear up suspicious and feedback collection about the teaching situation [45]. From the perspective of students, their perceived workload is obviously influenced by the teaching-learning conditions [41]. Tough workload will induce students to employ undesirable learning approaches, such as superficial or reproducing, which means passing the exam is the final purpose [14]. This kind of learning is difficult to distinguish between core and supporting materials [35], and without thorough understanding of the content [12]. Furthermore, students’ motivation also plays an important role, intrinsic

motivation treated as self-driven, leading to the adoption of a deep learning, however, extrinsic motivation regarded as insufficient self-driven, resulting in the selection of a surface learning [26]. All of these will ultimately be reflected in the education quality together with students’ outcomes and competences.

Nevertheless, it can be seen from the view of previous research that time is a pre-condition of workload [23]. The face-to-face contact with lectures are around two days in UK, where one hour of face-to-face teaching equates to four hours of independent study [36], medicine, engineering and science demanded more class contact hours compare with other disciplines [27], in fact, the freshman year requires 20 contact hours, and the junior year decreases by about half, but the total study time is basically unchanged [24]. In Canada, the higher education students spend a total 8.4 hours on all the activities per day [30], and university students spend 20 hours at formal classes in Irish, longer than 12 hours in Austria [13]. And in Latin America, the average weekly student workload is about 50 hours, with every contact hour estimated independent work of two hours [1]. In a word, it is unavoidable that class contact time will have an impact on workload and extracurricular learning, which is the same as China’s universities.

Notwithstanding, China’s HEIs have their own situation in terms of what learning content the classroom contact hours are allocated to and how much extra-curricular time is used as a supplement to classroom learning. Traditionally, China’s HEIs curricula in the credit system have been classified into three categories: compulsory courses, limited elective courses and public elective courses [47]. Compulsory courses are the framework supporting teaching-learning, their functions are like the skeletons of human beings. Thus, they can best reflect the characteristics of disciplines and majors [43], and the research on the class contact hours of compulsory courses is capable of providing insights of HEIs students’ daily learning status. Compulsory courses are commonly divided into two parts, public compulsory courses, containing physical education courses, ideological and political courses, elementary computer courses, and professional compulsory courses which means the basic and core courses of professional fields for all majors.

3. Analysis Data

A comprehensive university accredited by MOE was selected to analyze weekly class contact hours of compulsory course. It is one of the “211 Project” universities, and it contains the discipline categories of Economics Science, Law, Literature, Natural Science, Engineering, Management Science and Arts which are in accordance with Categories of Undergraduate Specialties in Regular Higher Education Institutions issued by MOE. In 2017, it passed second round Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education (QAUE) audit², and its fourth circle China Discipline Ranking (CDR) results³ are shown in Table 1. Apparently, it is an upper level

¹ http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-11/05/content_10269.htm

² http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/s7056/201802/t20180208_327120.html

³ <http://www.cdgc.edu.cn/xwyyjsjyxx/xxsbdxz/2012en/>

university, although it is not the top ones, such as Tsinghua University and Peking University. It has advantageous disciplines, and some of the disciplines are above the medium level, of course, to be admit, others are in the initial stage or improvement should be done. In short, this university is representative.

Compulsory courses of some disciplines were chosen as research objects, including course name, course ID, and corresponding credits. All the majors were classified into five cases, which were Journalism and Communication (JC), Science and Engineering (SE), Humanities and Social Science (HS), Economics and Management (EM), and Foreign Language and Literature (FL) [34]. China’s undergraduate education is usually four years with two semesters for each academic year, and the statistical data were collected from

grade 2007 to 2017, 2007 fall to 2018 spring semester, respectively, and the statistics covered more than 12,000 students which was illustrated in Table 2. According to Education Dictionary [5], learning 1 class (50 minutes) per week for lectures or tutorials in one semester, and then the students will obtain 1 credit. Apparently, the class contact hours can be calculated through credits. As a result, the average class contact hours of compulsory course in each academic semester can be obtained, including both public and professional parts. The arrangement of elective courses is quite free, and students can decide according to their own circumstances, or even have the right not to choose or drop out [16]. However, the arrangement of compulsory courses is fixed, and the corresponding learning behaviors have to be finished within the prescribed schedule [15].

Table 1. Selected university fourth circle CDR results.

Index	Discipline categories	First-level disciplines	Results
1	Economics Science	Unranked	None
2	Law	Unranked	None
3	Literature	Chinese language and literature	B-
		Foreign language and literature	C
		Journalism & Communication	A+
4	Natural Science	Unranked	None
5	Engineering	Electronic science and technology	C+
		Information and telecommunication engineering	B
		Computer science and technology	C+
6	Management Science	Unranked	None
7	Arts	Artistic theory	A-
		Music and dance studies	B
		Theatre film and TV studies	A+
		Fine Arts	B
		Design	B+

* Blank items mean the same as the above

Table 2. Number of undergraduates per grade in each case.

Grade	JC	SE	HS	EM	FL	Total
2007	160	307	85	194	211	957
2008	180	465	125	203	207	1180
2009	206	460	64	241	191	1162
2010	246	483	128	233	129	1219
2011	245	482	113	241	155	1236
2012	261	421	90	192	107	1071
2013	238	432	99	198	142	1109
2014	257	423	83	192	146	1101
2015	280	426	95	202	152	1155
2016	252	480	99	183	176	1190
2017	279	520	96	191	175	1261
Total	2604	4899	1077	2270	1791	12641

Case A. Journalism and Communication

Majors in this case include: Broadcasting and TV, Editing and Publishing, Journalism, Communication, Network and New Media, Advertising. These are the brand majors with outstanding social reputation of the selected university, and they have been ranked at the top of the previous CDR, furthermore, the students’ admission scores and graduation

Grade Point Average (GPA) were both high. The average class contact hours of compulsory course of case A was shown in Figure 1. It is not difficult to see that in the first five semesters, the class contact hours exceed 12 hours each week, especially in the first two semesters, which exceed 14 hours. Meanwhile, the proportion between professional and public parts almost increases semester by semester, and the teaching behavior is more and more inclined to the professional part.

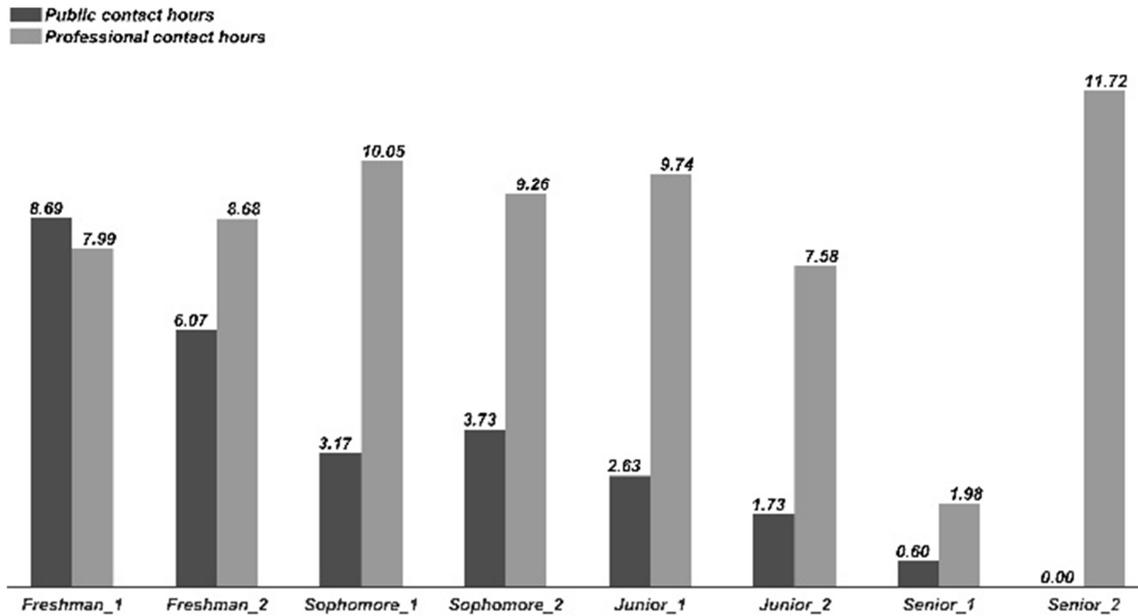


Figure 1. Average class contact hours of JC.

Case B. Science and Engineering

Majors in this case include: Applied Statistics, Information and Computing Science, Opt-Electronics Information Science and Engineering, Electronic Information Engineer, Telecommunication Engineering, Automation, Broadcasting and TV Engineering, Network Engineering, Digital Media Technology, Computer Science and Technology, Information Security and Software Engineering. These are the largest teaching-learning population of the selected university, and

they have been ranked upper level of the previous CDR, moreover, the employment situation of graduates is optimistic. The average class contact hours of compulsory course of case B was shown in Figure 2. Obviously, the class contact hours, which almost exceed 14 hours per week in the first three academic years, and even larger than 17 hours in freshman year, are a little bit more than the previous case. The increase of class contact hours is particularly reflected in the professional part.

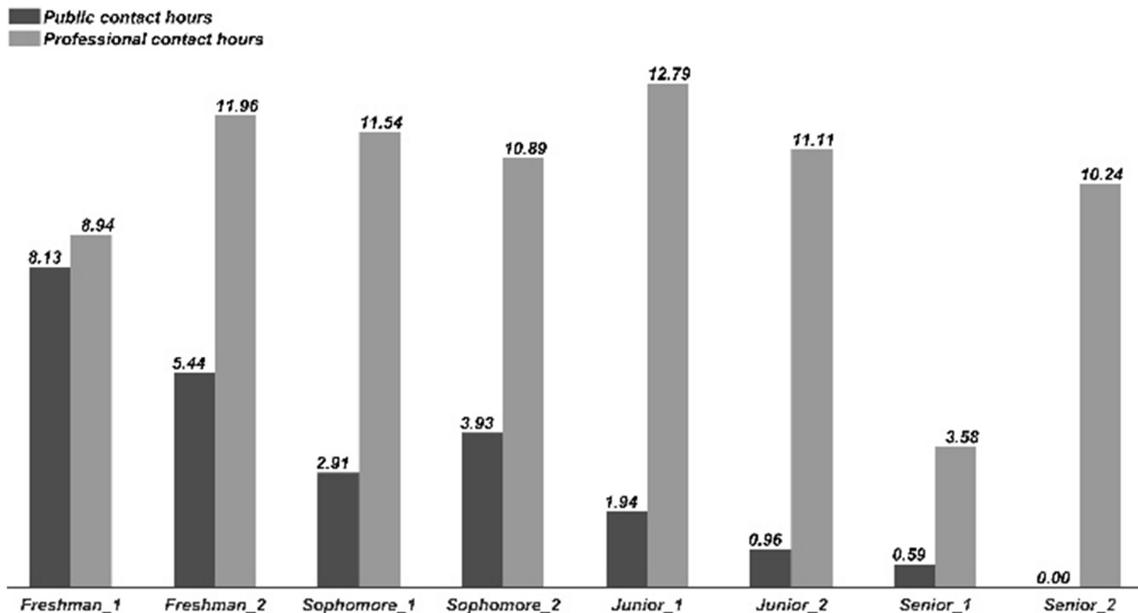


Figure 2. Average class contact hours of SE.

Case C. Humanities and Social Science

Majors in this case include: International Education of Chinese Language, Chinese Language and Literature, Chinese Language, Law, Sociology, Ideological and Political

Education. These majors are relatively small in the selected university, and some of them were in the middle of the last round CDR. Unfortunately, the employment situation of these graduates has been very severe. The average class contact

hours of compulsory course of case C was shown in Figure 3. In the first five semesters, the compulsory course time is still kept at 12 ~ 18 hours per week, which means the students of

this case work no less time in class than the above cases during the main learning period of university stage.

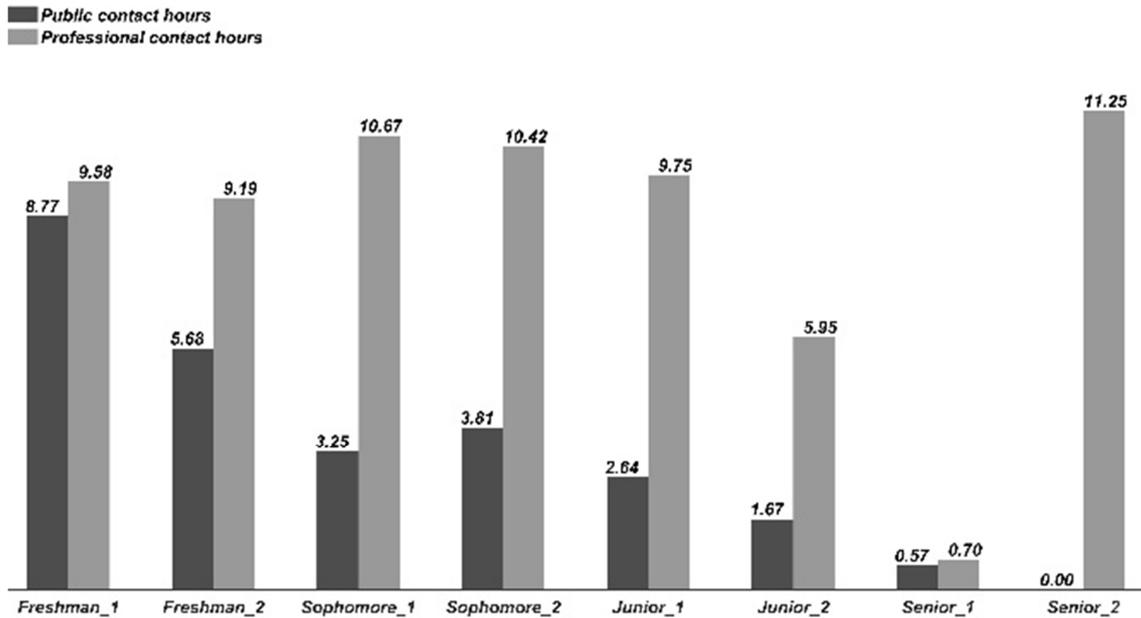


Figure 3. Average class contact hours of HS.

Case D. Economics and Management

Majors in this case include: Public Relations, Economics, International Economics and Trade, Information Management and Information Systems, Business Administration, Marketing, Accounting, Public Administration, Cultural Industry Management. These majors are not dominant in the selected

university, and they were unranked in the previous CDR. There are still many improvements to be done, but the population of teachers and students is comparatively large. The average class contact hours of compulsory course of case D was shown in Figure 4. Sophomore years cost fewer class contact hours, and the trend for other semesters is pretty much the same.

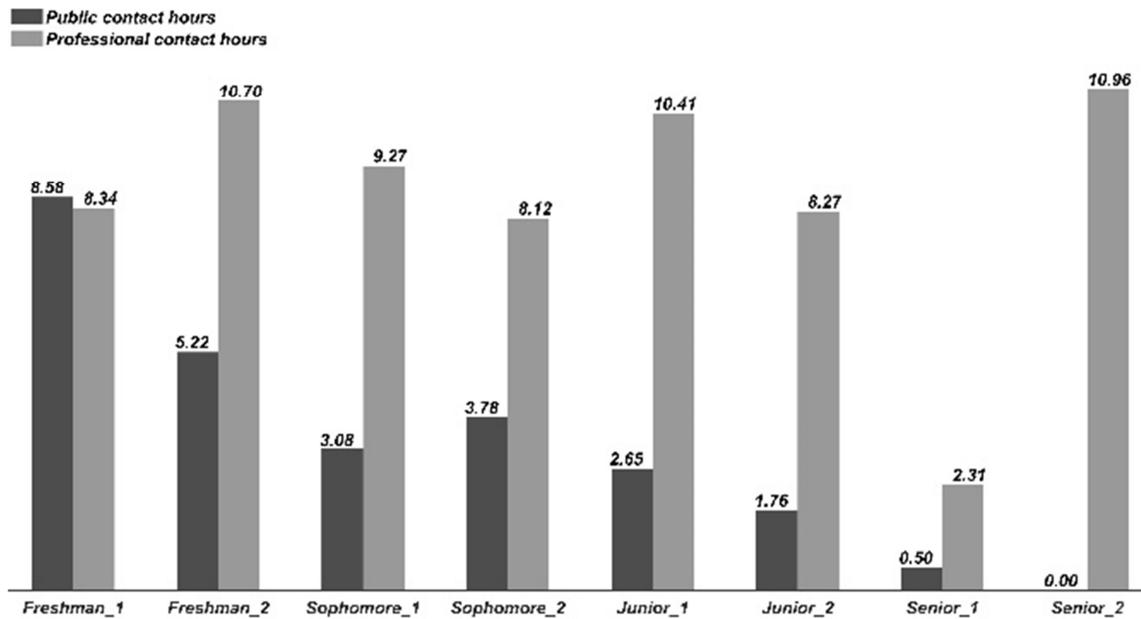


Figure 4. Average class contact hours of EM.

Case E. Foreign Language and Literature

Majors in this case include: English Language and Literature, all Non-English Language and Literature, and

Translation. These majors' previous CDR results were in the middle, but they are very attractive, every year many candidates pay attention to them and register for entrance

examination. The average class contact hours of compulsory course of case E was shown in Figure 5. Most students in this case commonly study in the cooperative institutions of the corresponding language countries for one junior semester or the junior year, and their class contact hours during these

period are not collected. They should spend more time training listening, speaking, reading and writing, and need to learn the culture of the target language country. Therefore, the class contact hours in this case are more than other cases mentioned above, especially the professional part.

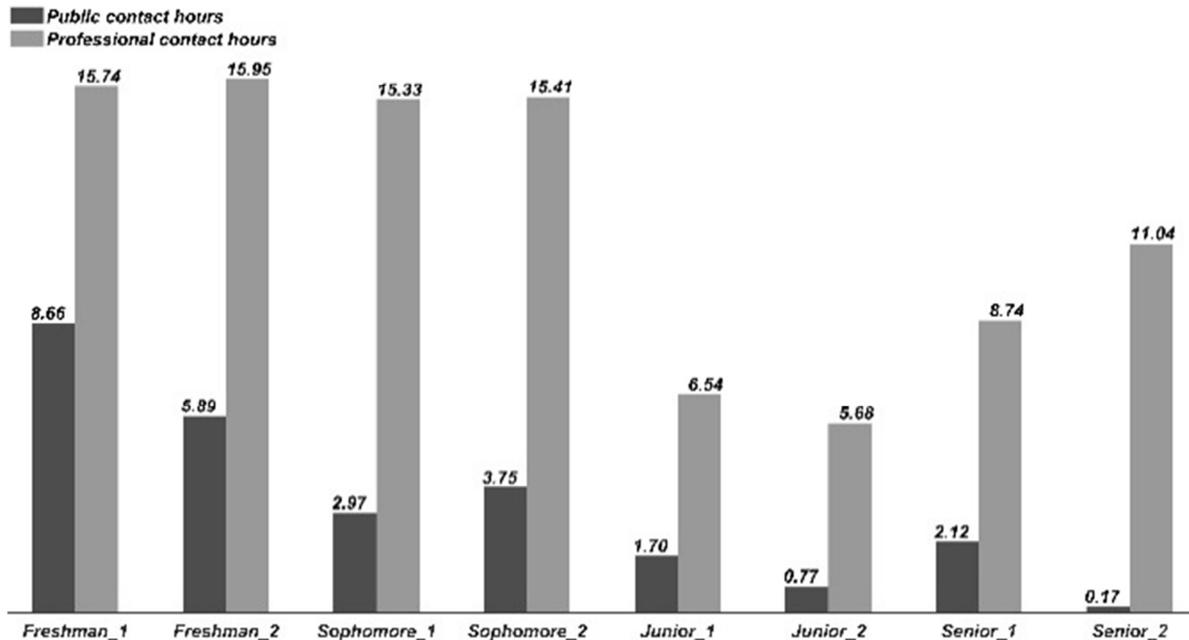


Figure 5. Average class contact hours of FL.

According to the above statistics, it is not difficult to find that no matter what case, the time occupied by public compulsory courses is almost the same, and it is gradually decreasing with the improvement of grade. Although this part of content is not closely related to the major, all students have to devote themselves to completing it. In terms of professional compulsory courses, the class contact hours in the first three academic years are around 9 ~ 10 hours, and *Foreign Language and Literature* is apparently more than others. Basically, the senior academic year of all cases is mainly used for graduation design and thesis. These data of class contact hours are based on compulsory courses, and students also need to take elective courses, that is to say, China's undergraduates have almost the same classroom learning time as foreign students. Teachers have the best understanding of students' learning status. Is there any hidden problems under the statistical data from the view of teachers?

4. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers in each case, through which some situations related to students' learning habits and status would be explored. The semi-structured interviews mainly focused on the following aspects,

1. Which is more important, teaching or learning?
2. Whether students can learn consciously and actively?
3. How to treat compulsory courses?
4. What is the role of teachers?

5. Dose modern technology contribute to teaching?

6. What other factors will affect students' learning?

All of the semi-structured interviews were carried out with the permission of the teachers, and there were no conflicts of interest and participants were ensured that their ideas would be reported anonymously.

First of all, the compulsory course attributes were explained to the interviewees, i.e. meaning and composition, as well as the quantitative analysis results of each academic semester of each category in the previous step. And then, the statistics of working hours in the relevant case abroad were introduced. The age of interviewees was divided into three stages: under 35, between 35 and 45, and over 45, including the department head, experienced professional teachers, and young teaching backbone. Their teaching period was also divided into three stages: under 10 years, whose entry time was not long, facing a lot of promotion pressure, teaching philosophy and methods were rather new; between 10 and 20 years, who have obtained the associate senior title, with little promotion pressure, and they were able to combine traditional and new teaching schemes; and over 20 years, who had no promotion pressure, with the main energy returned to teaching, and they were relatively good at traditional teaching style. The characterizations of the interviewees selected were shown in Table 3. Their opinions were objective and convincing as they had enough teaching experience in all grades from freshman year to senior year, and their professional field were comparatively stable.

Table 3. Interviewees' condition and major categories.

Teacher	A	B	C	D	E
Age	35~45	>45	>45	35~45	<35
Teaching Period	10~20	>20	>20	10~20	<10
Major Category	JC	SE	HS	EM	FL

Teacher A

Teacher A was a female associate professor with 18 years of teaching experience. Her subject was Communication, but she taught almost all majors in the Journalism and Communication category, including undergraduate and graduate students.

I feel that Communication is an interdisciplinary major, which needs the support of other disciplines. The students of Communication science have higher requirements for the knowledge of politics, sociology, literature, philosophy and other disciplines, and the training of mathematics and logic thinking are critical.

Under the educational background of cultivating high-quality journalism and communication talents in the era of mass communication, teacher A believed that the learning of students mainly reflected in two aspects.

Firstly, you need to increase the study of theoretical system, focusing on the improvement of theoretical literacy. Our courses of ontology of communication is relatively comprehensive across the country. Introduction to communication and communication theory belong to the category of historicism and methodology, and other courses such as group and organizational communication, environmental communication and political economy of communication. Then, you should pay attention to social practice. At present, the traditional "collecting, editing, writing and commenting" is still regarded as the core business, which belongs to the content production. You can also freely choose other corresponding practical operation combinations according to your personal interests, such as visual and auditory fields.

In recent years, the concept of higher education has changed, professional courses were compressed, and meanwhile, the construction of general education was strengthened. Teacher A found that these situations also put forward new demands for students' learning style.

You should constantly expand the amount and scope of reading, especially after class. Many contents could be studied and discussed, and the related theories usually have a certain depth. Besides reading, you have to think deeply in combination with practice. No doubt, I will make some choices and guidance for you, which is time consuming.

She attempted to adopt novel teaching methods to shift the focus from teaching to learning, such as flipped classroom, so that students can participate in the teaching process, which further improving the quality of learning [48].

Teacher A admitted that the transformation of basic education mode was more important. The advantages of China's elementary education was the understanding capability, students had a solid foundation of knowledge, however, majority of them were still task-driven and with the

purpose of getting a high score.

You can easily find that the ratio 1:2 between classroom learning time and after-class learning time is hardly achieved; poor initiatives in learning or weak independent thinking abilities are common. The ideal state is that you have more independent learning space, but the whole education mode in China is still based on classroom teaching.

She did not mean that foreign students were more conscious than Chinese students were, because they have long been trained in the manner of independent learning, which they taken for granted. For the completion of assignments, it was not only to find a standard answer, but many undergraduates in China still aimed to it, and the time for learning after class was short.

Teacher B

Teacher B was a senior professor whose major was applied statistics, and she was not only a doctoral supervisor, but also taught undergraduates in many majors.

I should point out that the use of modern teaching attachments in the classroom may not reduce the workload of learning. Mathematical formula derivation is a way to deepen understanding, it is a gradual process for the symbols into the brain to transform into practical meanings, and blackboard writing cannot be simply replaced by PowerPoint. Modular or project-based teaching mode is easy to reflect the effect, but the relationship between modules need to be repeated to master, and I always emphasize holistic thinking to students.

She took the view that effective classroom teaching can improve students' efficiency and reduce the invalid working hours after class. However, combined with the results of quantitative analysis in sophomore and junior years, she felt class contact hours were a little too much. Higher education was distinguished by its focus on independent learning, which may contain preparation for scheduled sessions, follow-up work, wider reading or practices, completion of assessment tasks, or revision [40], unfortunately, current HEIs evaluation mechanism cannot examine the contents of the above steps.

I have to keep on repeating in class in order to deepen the learning impression, and may be it is why classroom teaching occupies a long time. What should be admitted is that students' self-discipline is inadequate, and they are used to learning passively with me. Anyway, if I pay more, students will gain more.

Teacher B also figured out a worse phenomenon, students did not pay enough attention to the syllabus, and their learning become utilitarian.

If I have a software design course, may be many students to join. Because they think they can do internships immediately after grasping it, which can help them to find a good job. However, the results of theory courses may be the opposite.

Based on years of teaching and research experience, she insisted that advanced mathematics, mathematical analysis, digital signal processing, communication principle, computer system, operating system and so on, although the contents

were boring, they were the basis of big data analysis, modern communication and artificial intelligence, rigorous theoretical study was an essential condition for further development.

Teacher C

Teacher C was also a senior professor whose teaching experience was more than one upper-level university. His teaching scope covered undergraduate, master and doctoral students, and his research work was also excellent.

I think, compared with foreign universities, the number of courses offered is basically the same, but the general education and interdisciplinary courses are still inadequate. From the view of education development, we should give students greater freedom and encourage them to learn consciously, for the sake of forming an investigative learning atmosphere.

He believed that from freshman year to junior year, the learning time in class should be inversely proportional to that after class, which means the higher the grade, the more emphasis ought to be placed on independent learning. It was serious to cultivate students' operational ability, such as classroom review writing and extracurricular training, which could play an active part in improving learning efficiency.

The diversity of the nature of disciplines leads to different learning styles. Teacher C strongly expressed the intangible requirements of humanities and social science majors for learning.

Whether you can seize the time to read relevant books at university period will make a significant divergence in your professional level upon graduation.

He specified that although universities were constantly strengthening supervision and management actions, including the introduction of elimination mechanism, in order to enhance students' enthusiasm, there was still a lack of initiative in after class learning, and the effectiveness of universities' action remained to be verified.

Teacher C understood the employment pressure encountered by students of these majors.

I often hear that students have to participate in various social internships to enrich their resumes for coping with the fierce competition.

He worried that these activities inevitably cost a lot of time and energy, which would naturally occupy the after class learning. Furthermore, the full curriculum schedule would increase students' perception of workload, they had to prepare enough time to finish the courses or do some fixed work in a certain time.

Teacher D

Teacher D himself had an interdisciplinary education background, and he also gave lectures to students from many different majors and even different universities.

In my opinion, the biggest problem is that most teachers have insufficient enterprise experience. Majority of them go directly from the classroom to the classroom, that is to say, they become university teachers as soon as they graduate.

He noticed that the teaching of theoretical contents was rich and abundant, and the case analysis seemed to be dull and

shriveled. The theory study could be tested by practice, but the confusions encountered in practice hardly be solved timely and effectively.

He said that students' consciousness of independent exploration, professional collaboration and social cooperation should be strengthened.

Universities often aim to be world-class, and students' demands on themselves should be raised accordingly.

He stressed that modern technology held an increasingly meaningful position as a learning assistant [4], but the communication with teachers should be cherished. Face to face Q & A and discussion could provide plenty of help [38], which were not brought by ordinary classroom learning and after class practice.

Teacher D was also deeply impressed by the compression of classroom time required by the superior department.

Some of my courses have been compressed by 1/3 each semester; I have to put more energy into preparation and explain the same or even more contents in less time than before, because all aspects of economy and society are developing, and knowledge and cases are updated rapidly.

He also recognized that this put forward higher to students, which forced them to arrange their time after class more effectively, and the work such as extended reading, counterpart practice and topic discussion should be completed one by one.

Teacher E

Teacher E was a young backbone of teaching, with overseas study background, very familiar with modern teaching methods both in China and abroad.

There are two significant differences in foreign languages learning between China and abroad. Firstly, the language family of China, or most of Asian countries, is different from that of western countries, and learning span and difficulty are relatively large. Secondly, the purpose of learning is different, western countries often learn it for the purpose of learning an interesting culture, while in China, it is treated as a tool, with the emphasis on languages themselves.

She indicated the amount of 15 hours of professional course per week for language majors was not much, and many other universities were even much longer. However, it was more valued to cultivate students' interest, because language learning was very exhausted and it was hard to go deep without interest. The more advanced the students become, the more proficient they were in mastering the language, and the focus should be adjusted to how to construct the thinking system. The class participation was crucial, which not only required a long period running in between teachers and students, but also involved students to expand after class reading [10].

I am quite sure that language learning have a very high invisible requirement on your time investment.

Teacher E realized that students tended to confront a professional change after graduation, whether they were going to work or continued to study. This phenomena might cover news communication, law, foreign trade, finance and other fields, and it was essential to master relevant social

investigation methods and statistical tools.

I insist that the time and energy of undergraduates should be devoted to professional study. What I need to do is to arouse students' interest in language or culture.

She added that in modern teaching philosophy, language learning was progressively transferred to culture learning, and from being able to speak to thinking, which also was the basis for future work in other areas. Actually, students minored in other majors or took part in relevant training, which would inevitably occupy the learning time and increase their burden.

5. Discussion

MOE's administration on HEIs is comprehensive. Public compulsory course is required by MOE, such courses appear in every semester except the last one, and the proportion of class contact hours decline from about 50%, moreover, it should be set up in all majors of HEIs at all levels in China. The nature of these courses more belongs to general education and involved less professional knowledge. However, it takes up the learning time of undergraduates and is a compulsory workload. In addition, MOE has also stipulated the quality criteria for many majors, and the teaching behavior should be carried out within the framework [21]. Furthermore, MOE organizes and implements a series quality assessment of HEIs to ensure their competitiveness, and the allocation of policy or financial resources is related to the evaluation results [32]. The intention of many measures is good, but it should not be ignored the bureaucracy in the whole process and the homogenization of HEIs [31]. In order to provide intellectual support and high-quality labor resources for the economy and society, China's higher education reform has always been in the state of "on the way".

Teachers' personal contribution is crucial to guarantee students' learning quality. To achieve a good teaching, teachers have to devote countless time and energy, including the preparation of pre-class materials, the arrangement and design of classroom teaching, reading and practice instruction after class, troubleshooting, homework correction and explanation, which involved huge efforts [17]. Nevertheless, what directly associated with teachers assessment, personal remuneration and promotion are the number of research projects and published papers [29]. Many teachers have to free themselves from heavy teaching task by various ways, such as lectures by industry experts, after-class instruction by teaching assistants, slowing down the update of teaching content, and reducing Q & A schedule, etc. [20]. Most teachers can make choices rely on professional ethics, but this kind of problem is unable to be resolved unilaterally on teachers' personal sacrifice, and it still needs policy support at the level of HEIs [28]. Higher education, especially undergraduate education, should concentrate on teaching. Only by solving teachers' concerns can they better perform their responsibility.

Learning consciousness and initiative will directly affect students' outcomes [22]. China's elementary education has not changed the reality of exam-oriented education system, fraction only theory or cramming method of teaching existed

on a large scale [33], therefore, undergraduates are used to follow their teachers. The enthusiasm for active participation in learning is not high, particularly their interest in independent learning is generally low. At present, many teaching methods in HEIs are aimed at improving students' learning habits. For example, in the exhibition of works, the platform is transferred to the students, and they are the analysts or the product directors, and their sense of honor, value and satisfaction are stimulated during the display, so as to inspire their learning enthusiasm [46]. Moreover, the mode of small-class teaching is more and more recognized by teachers and students. Usually, teachers can communicate with each student when the class size is about 20, and students have the opportunity to express their gains and doubts. Teachers also conduct students to participate in the learning process, although sometimes students are passive, it still plays an active role [44]. The change of learning habits cannot be accomplished overnight. Suppose the class contact hours are suddenly cut down and learning is completely under the control of students themselves, they will feel puzzled and at a loss. As a result, the arrangement of class contact hours in China's HEIs is objective and reasonable, and students' classroom workload is acceptable.

The assessment of teaching and learning outcomes calls for diversified criteria, and a single indicator is hard to achieve the purpose. With the commercialization of higher education, students are sometimes like customers. It is easy to reach an agreement between teachers and students to some extent. Teachers will give students high marks to exchange their satisfactory evaluation of teaching, but such scores cannot truly on behalf of the quality [42]. Students' examination results are difficult to correctly represent their mastery of knowledge. It is common for students to review in order to cope with the examination, and the persuasiveness of scores is extremely weak. In a word, the assessment of teaching and learning achievements should be multi-dimensional [49]. Vertically, knowledge inheritance is not only reflected in one session of students, but also should be integrated with learning, graduation and employment status of many sessions. Horizontally, teaching and learning should jump out of the framework of one single university, introduce more peer and industry reviews, and establish a more comprehensive and reasonable evaluation mechanism. To be admit, "emphasizing human relations" and "keeping up appearances" should be reduced and avoided.

The teaching mode is constantly updated. Covid-19 has changed the development model of many industries, and higher education is no exception. Online education and information technology have become a new mode of daily teaching in higher education [11]. For the same course, students have many choices, and teachers have to make the teaching in a simple but in-depth ways, meanwhile, they should ensure the seductiveness of the contents, otherwise, the number of students attending the class will be lost in large. However, online education makes teachers more concentrated on teaching, in the contrast, students can arrange their schedule flexibly and are no longer completely limited by

fixed time. The learning sequence is also relatively free, and students can choose the class order according to their interests and abilities. Online education gets rid of the restriction of the number of classrooms, the size of online classes will not be too large, which reduce the communication limitation between teachers and students, and every student have the opportunity to participate in classroom learning. It is worth noting that information technology also has inevitable negative effects. For example, WeChat facilitates timely connection between teachers and students, which makes it simple to cut off the integrity and continuity of the working state. Students will ask teachers when they encounter problems, it is effortless to give up independent thinking, and teachers' work will be constantly interrupted by WeChat [37]. Everything has two sides and should be adjusted depending on the actual situation. In a word, the final effect of the new teaching mode should be judged by the real gains of students.

6. Conclusion

Compulsory courses are the classroom learning contents that China's HEIs students must complete. From the standpoint of the time occupied, China's undergraduates have more classroom learning tasks. There are two main reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, MOE, as the top management organization of China's HEIs, has its clear regulations on the curriculum requirements of undergraduates. Secondly, the learning habits of undergraduates are still based on classroom learning and teacher-centered, and their awareness of independent learning should be strengthened. Higher education is not only a learning process, but also a process of learning state transition. It should be noted that the current reform measures of higher education have paid attention to the importance of cultivating undergraduates' independent and exploratory learning consciousness.

Many modern teaching models and information technology have been applied to higher education, but the most critical factor is still people. How teachers balance the relationship between teaching and scientific research, and their sense of responsibility in the teaching process have a vital impact on the learning status and quality of undergraduates. Professional teaching requires more and more knowledge in different disciplines. Science and engineering and economics and management should be closely combined with the practical application of enterprise development. News communication, humanities and social science and foreign languages and literature need to have an in-depth understanding of different cultural backgrounds and social foundations. It is better for the contemporary undergraduates to hold an autonomic, open and inclusive learning attitude and change from task-driven to interest-driven learning.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the educational and teaching innovation project, Communication University of China under Grant JG21048, A Comparative Study on the Design and

Development Trend of Journalism and Communication Curriculum System; and Asia Media Research Centre, Communication University of China under Grant AMRC2020-9, A Research on Reports of Active Aging in Japanese Media.

References

- [1] Alarcón, F., Beneitone, P., Armas, R. D., Kieling, S., Suñé, L. & Veneros, D. (2013). Student Workload and Degree Profiles: the Experience of CLAR Credits in Latin America. *Tuning Journal for Higher Education* 1 (1): 165-186.
- [2] Arocena, R. & Sutz, J. (2001). Changing Knowledge Production and Latin American Universities. *Research Policy* 30 (8): 1221-1234.
- [3] Bowyer, K. (2012). A Model of Student Workload. *Journal of Higher Education Policy* 34 (3): 239-258.
- [4] Campbell, M. & Fox, L. ed. (2014). *Learning Technology Effectiveness*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Technology.
- [5] CCED (Compilation Committee of Education Dictionary). (1991). Volume 3 in *Education Dictionary*, Edited by M. Gu, 19-20. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press.
- [6] Chambers, E. (1992). Work-load and the Quality of Student Learning. *Studies in Higher Education* 17 (2): 141-153.
- [7] Chambers, E. (1994). Assessing Learner Workload. *Materials Production in Open and Distance Learning*, 141-153, Edited by F. Lockwood. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- [8] Chen, D. Y. (2002). The Amalgamation of Chinese Higher Education Institutions. *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 10 (20).
- [9] Chen, X.-F. (2011). Ideal-Oriented Policymaking: An Analysis of the 985 Project Policy Process. *Chinese Education & Society* 44 (5): 8-18.
- [10] Chiang, I.-C. N. (2014). Extra-curricular Reading in Taiwan. *The Asian EFL Journal Professional Teaching Articles* 80: 4-33.
- [11] Crawford, J., Butler-Henderson, K., Rudolph, J. Malkawi, B., Glowatz, M., Burton, R. Magni, P. A. & Lam, S. (2020). COVID-19: 20 Countries' Higher Education Intra-period Digital Pedagogy Responses. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching* 3 (1): 9-27.
- [12] Dahlgren, L.-O. (1998). *Outcomes of Learning*. Scottish Academic Press.
- [13] Darmody, M., Smyth, E. & Unger, M. (2008). Field of Study and Students' Workload in Higher Education: Ireland and Austria in Comparative Perspective. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 49 (4-5): 329-346.
- [14] Entwistle, N. & Ramsden, P. (2015). *Understanding Student Learning (Routledge Revivals, 1st Ed.)*. London: Routledge Press.
- [15] Fadelmoula, T. (2018). The Impact of Class Attendance on Student Performance. *International Research Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences* 6 (2): 47-49.

- [16] Ghonim, M. & Eweda, N. (2018). Investigating Elective Courses in Architectural Education. *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 7 (2): 235-256.
- [17] Goe, L. & Leslie, S. (2008). Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: Making the Most of Resent Research. *TQ Research & Policy Brief*.
- [18] Gu, H.-B. & Xue, S.-S. (2009). The Proportion of Elective Courses should be Improved in China. [woguo gaoxiao xuanxiuke bizhong jidai tigao (in Chinese)]. *China Higher Education Research* 10: 85-87.
- [19] Harman, G. (2005). Australian Social Scientists and Transition to a More Commercial University Environment. *Higher Education Research & Development* 24 (1): 79-94.
- [20] Hemer, S. R. (2014). Finding Time for Quality Teaching: An Ethnographic Study of Academic Workloads in the Social Sciences and Their Impact on Teaching Practices. *Higher Education Research & Development* 33 (3): 483-495.
- [21] HETSC (Higher Education Teaching Steering Committee, Ministry of Education) (2018). National Standards for Undergraduate Majors Teaching Quality of Higher Education. [putong gaodeng xuexiao benke zhuanylei jiaoxue zhiliang guojia biao zhun (in Chinese)]. *Higher Education Press*.
- [22] Jagersma, J. & Parsons, J. (2011). Empowering Students as Active Participants in Curriculum Design and Implementation. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work* 8 (2): 114-121.
- [23] Karjalainen, A., Alha, K. & Jutila, S. (2008). *Give Me Time to Think: Determining Student Workload in Higher Education*. Oulu: Oulu University Press.
- [24] Kember, D. & Leung, D. Y. P. (1998). Influences upon Students' Perceptions of Workload. *Educational Psychology* 18 (3): 293-307.
- [25] Kember, D. & Leung, D. Y. P. (2006). Characterising a Teaching and Learning Environment Conducive to Making Demands on Students while not Making Their Workload Excessive. *Studies in Higher Education* 32 (2): 185-198.
- [26] Kyndt, E., Dochy, F., Struyven, K. & Cascallar, E. (2011). The Direct and Indirect Effect of Motivation for Learning on Student's Approaches to Learning through the Perceptions of Workload and Task Complexity. *Higher Education Research & Development* 30 (2): 135-150.
- [27] Kyndt, E., Berghmans, I., Dochy, F. & Bulckens, L. (2014). Time is not enough, Workload in Higher Education: A Student Perspective. *Higher Education Research & Development* 33 (4): 684-698.
- [28] Leisyte, L., Enders, J. & de Boer, H. (2009). The Balance between Teaching and Research in Dutch and English Universities in the Context of University Governance Reforms. *Higher Education* 58 (5): 619-635.
- [29] Lemass, B. & Stace, R. (2010). Towards Teaching and Research Parity: A Teaching Quality and Reward Framework. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 14 (1): 21-27.
- [30] Lockwood, F. (1999). Estimating Student Workload: Implications for Quality Learning. *Staff and Educational Development International* 3 (3): 281-289.
- [31] Liu, S.-Y. & Rosa, M. J. (2008). Quality Assessment of Undergraduate Education in China: A Policy Analysis. *Higher Education Management and Policy* 20 (3): 79-96.
- [32] Liu, S.-Y. (2015). Higher Education Quality Assessment in China: An Impact Study. *Higher Education Policy* 28 (2): 175-195.
- [33] Ma, G.-L. (2011). On the Problems and Countermeasures of Chinese Elementary Education. *Journal of Jinhua Polytechnic* 11 (1): 35-38.
- [34] Ma, S., Li, Y.-R. & Zhang, P.-P. (2021). Analysis of Undergraduates' Courses in China's Comprehensive Universities – A Case Study. *Higher Education Studies* 11 (1): 42-54.
- [35] Marton, F. & Wenestam, C. (1978). Qualitative Differences in the Understanding and Retention of the Main Point in Some Texts Based on the Principle – Example Structure. *Academic Press* 32: 633-643.
- [36] Money, J., Nixon, S., Tracy, F., Hennessy, C., Ball, E., & Dinning, T. (2017). Undergraduate Student Expectations of University in the United Kingdom: What Really Matters to Them? *Cogent Education* 4 (1), 1301855.
- [37] Neshkovska, S. (2018). Contemporary Challenges of Higher Education Teachers. *Quality of University Learning and Teaching Conference Proceedings*: 32-42, Brdo pri Kranju, 6. April 2016.
- [38] Ng, K. C. (2007). Replacing Face-to-Face Tutorials by Synchronous Online Technologies: Challenges and pedagogical implications. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 8 (1): 1-15.
- [39] Nyamupangedengu, E. (2017). Investigating Factors that Impact the Success of Studies in a Higher Education Classroom: A Case Study. *Journal of Education* 68: 113-130.
- [40] QAA (the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) (2013). Explaining student workload – Guidance about Providing Information for Students. © *The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education* 2013.
- [41] Ramsden, P. (2003). Learning from the Student's Perspective. *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* (2nd Ed.), Chapter 5, London & New York: Taylor & Francis Group.
- [42] Sun, A., & Sun, Y.-Z. (2019). A Study of the Teaching-Evaluating Behavior of College Students: Based on Game Theory. *Journal of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University* 5: 44-50.
- [43] Sun, K. (2015). Analysis on the Cross Shaped Curriculum System of the World's High-Level Universities. [shijie gaoshuiping daxue kecheng tixide shizixing tezheng tanxi (in Chinese)]. *Education Exploration* 1: 151-156.
- [44] Weaver, R. & Qi, J. (2005). Classroom Organization and Participation: College Students' Perceptions. *The Journal of Higher Education* 76 (5): 570-601.
- [45] Whitelock, D., Thorpe, M. & Galley, R. (2015). Student Workload: A Case Study of Its Significance, Evaluation and Management at the Open University. *Distance Education* 36 (2): 161-176.
- [46] Williams, K. C. & Williams, C. C. (2011). Five Key Ingredients for Improving Student Motivation. *Research in Higher Education Journal* 11.

- [47] Wu, D. (1980). A Few Tentative Ideas of Implementing Credit System – Discuss Teaching Plan Concurrently. [shixing xuefenzhi de jidian shexiang – jianlun jiaoxue jihua (in Chinese)]. *Peoples Education* 4: 16-17+21.
- [48] Yansyah & Nadia, H. (2019). Sharing Practice: Using Flipped Classroom for Developing Students' English Skills and Learning Autonomy. *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on English Language Teaching, Linguistics and Literature*: 231-235.
- [49] Yin C.-C. & Tam, W.-M. (1997). Multi-models of Quality in Education. *Quality Assurance in Education* 5 (1): 22-31.