

Current Situation and Challenges in Undergraduate Professional Talent Cultivation Curricula in Human Resources Management

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Abstract: Higher education is the bridge between the cultivation of modern talents and the development of enterprises. Whether the subject education can keep up with the times and follow the progress of the times, respond to the industry's current situation, and cultivate talents that meet the needs of the industry is a major issue. Therefore, this research is aimed at five universities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area of China that provide complete human resource management undergraduate professional personnel training courses, Zhaoqing University (ZU), Guangdong University of Finance (GUF), Guangzhou University (GU), Jinan University (JU) and Shenzhen University (SU) are used to compare and analyze the issues of curriculum planning, type modules, credit structure, and study among the various schools, and analyze the problems that appear in the process of studying this professional knowledge, to put forward relevant reflections and suggestions. The study found that: (1) ZU and GU have the highest requirements for the graduation total credit planning; (2) The order of emphasis on course types varies from school to school. ZU places too much emphasis on general education and practical courses while neglecting professional courses; (3) Planning, and compared with the four schools, the curriculum lacks an international perspective. The research results are useful for reference in curriculum planning in the field of human resource management in colleges and universities, and can also provide a reference for colleges and universities to establish relevant departments or categories of education and training.

Keywords: Human resource management. Higher education. Curriculum. Education quality. Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

1. Introduction

Curriculum planning and design is a complex process that is influenced by various factors. The relevance and integrity of talent cultivation curriculum planning and design is fundamental to achieving high-quality talent cultivation. Therefore, in the pursuit of reform in the cultivation of excellent professionals through undergraduate programs, countries worldwide have focused on integrating separate curricula, constructing new curricula for specific core competencies, and introducing career specialty programs for enhancing employability. The motivations for this reform are driven by the trend of globalization and the global economy [1].

In 2020, the Ministry of Education of China published National Standards on the Specialty Teaching Quality in Higher Education Institutions [2], which stipulate strict standards regarding major curriculum planning and design. The core standards also specify regulations on curriculum planning and design for the human resources management (HRM) major. Many students completing their study at higher education institutions are disregarded by the general public and enterprises because the professionals cultivated at such institutions do not meet the job requirements of enterprises. Problems such as unclear cultivation goals, diverse core competencies, lack of consistency among courses, unreasonable professional knowledge structures in curricula and course content, and insufficient cultivation of international skills impede applicants from meeting enterprise job requirements. Talent quality does not match the demand of enterprises, leaving a considerable gap in the improvement of cultivation standards for HRM professionals. These problems undermine the development of higher education institutions and HRM education [3-5]. Therefore, the formulation of an effective HRM professional cultivation curriculum is crucial for undergraduate HRM educators.

The quality of curriculum planning in HRM professional talent cultivation ultimately determines the quality and proficiencies of students. However, few studies have investigated this aspect, reflecting the low concern regarding this matter in academia. Thus, we identified higher education institutions that provide complete HRM professional cultivation curricula in Guangdong Province and compared and analyzed their programs. Five higher education institutions in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macau Greater Bay Area were selected: Zhaoqing University (ZU), Guangdong University of Finance (GUF), Guangzhou University (GU), Jinan University (JU), and Shenzhen University (SU). The goal was to understand and compare the HRM professional cultivation goals, curriculum planning, and curriculum design between the five institutions.

The study results contribute to discussion of curriculum planning and design, which have received limited attention in the HRM field; help mitigate the academia–industry gap; and provide practical suggestions for HRM curriculum planning and design development. The current findings may serve as a reference for domestic higher education institutions to devise HRM professional curriculum planning and design, thereby promoting overall educational development.

2. Literature Review

Researchers have explored HRM educational orientation, education resources, and graduate employment. Wang and Yao (2014)[6] indicated that the rapid development of undergraduate institutions has resulted in negative effects including unreasonable and inadequate HRM curricular structures, declining education quality, and ignorance of graduates' employment competitiveness. Ma (2013)[7] analyzed the HRM curriculum planning of Guangdong College of Finance and determined that the curriculum design was inconsistent with actual HRM professional development requirements. Fang and Lin (2020)[8] analyzed the topics covered in HRM professional education and the proportions of such topics. Their results indicated that the professional topic content was narrow and outdated, and the curriculum design overemphasized practice and lacked theoretical discourses and analysis. Thus, the design hampered the formation of a professional knowledge connection, affecting the depth and breadth of students' knowledge and failing to correspond to the new economic development environments in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macau Greater Bay Area and requirements of capabilities cultivation in HRM professionals. Fang et al. (2020)[9] claimed that HRM professionals have been limited by digital information technology, industrial renovation, and intelligentization. As the base of talent cultivation, higher education institutions have been inclined to adopt original thinking models in curriculum planning. The theory and practice of curriculum design are inconsistent with the current knowledge economy, big data and smart environments, and talent cultivation systems required by enterprises. This problem leads to poor learning motivations, insufficient literacy in various domain knowledge, and lacking analysis and decision-making abilities among HRM students, thereby hindering students from fostering contemporary higher order thinking.

Davidson et al. (2017)[10] compared HRM education in Australia and China and indicated that the HRM curriculum planning in China should consider international workplaces as a relevant context instead of solely focusing on the need of individual enterprises. Fang and Hu (2019)[4] compared HRM curriculum planning in Guangdong and Taiwan and revealed that university HRM curriculum planning in Taiwan was more diverse than that in Guangdong. In Taiwan, HRM curricula feature hierarchical frameworks and diversity and emphasize students' multifaceted professional development. Relevant courses are provided for subsidiary professional fields related to HRM. Moreover, students' international experiences are valued and enhanced to stress the responses to human capital reform in the age of globalization. Zhao et al. (2018)[11] and Li (2018)[12] have reported that domestic HRM curriculum design is monotonous, fails to address international concepts, and necessitates optimization and innovation to solve the problem of inadequate curriculum allocation for talent cultivation models. Thus, HRM proficiency is determined by the quality of the curricula, and curriculum planning is fundamental to talent cultivation [13].

3. Comparison and Analysis of Professional Cultivation Curriculum Planning Devised by Different Institutions

We divided the talent cultivation curriculum planning of the five institutions into general education courses, basic discipline courses, specialty courses, and practical teaching courses. The curriculum category, credit value, and attendance methods are summarized in Appendix 1. The total credits required for graduation in all five institutions satisfied the requirements of the Ministry of Education. The total

credits required ranged from 140 and 160 (160 credits for ZU, 155 credits for GUF, 150.5 credits for GU, 160 credits for JU, and 140 credits for SU). The HRM specialties in these institutions manifested the following characteristics:

3.1. Providing HRM Specialties in The Management Discipline

The five institutions set HRM specialties in colleges related to the management field (Table 1). GUF and SU established HRM specialties as independent departments. The other institutions included HRM specialties in their industrial and business management departments. Despite the different divisions, the departments still belong to industrial and business management.

Table 1: HRM specialty distribution of various institutions.

Institution	College	Department	Specialty
Zhaoqing University(ZU)	Economics and Management College	Industrial and Business Management Department	HRM specialty
Guangdong University of Finance(GUF)	School of Business Administration	Human Resource Management Department	HRM specialty
Guangzhou University(GU)	School of Management	Industrial and Business Management Department	HRM specialty
Jinan University(JU)	Management School	Industrial and Business Management Department	HRM specialty
Shenzhen University(SU)	College of Management	Human Resource Management Department	HRM specialty

3.2. Credits dedicated to general education courses, with zu demonstrating the optimal performance

General courses help students to actively understand their surrounding culture, society, nature, and specialties from objective perspectives and develop confident and adaptive attitudes [14]. Regarding curriculum planning, ZU, GUF, GU, JU, and SU respectively dedicated 62, 52, 42, 47, and 39 credits to general education. The proportion of general course credits to the total graduation requirement credits for ZU, GUF, GU, JU, and SU was 38.75%, 33.55%, 27.91%, 29.38%, and 27.86%, respectively. An increase in general course learning hours reduces the course hours available for specialty courses. The proportion of the credits revealed that SU and GU allocated fewer hours for general education course modules, whereas ZU allocated the most hours among the five institutions. Therefore, the students majoring in HRM at ZU had greater humanistic knowledge but less specialty knowledge compared with their counterparts in other institutions.

3.3. Credits dedicated to basic discipline courses, with JU placing the highest emphasis

Basic discipline courses provide foundational and prerequisite knowledge for specialty courses. ZU, GUF, GU, and JU dedicated 17.5 (10.94% of the total graduation credits), 39 (25.16%), 37.5 (24.92%), and 63 (39.38%) credits, respectively, to such courses. The learning modules were further divided into three subcategories: accounting, marketing, and tourism. At least 4 credits must be earned in each subcategories. SU incorporated basic discipline courses into specialty curricula. Among the five institutions, JU placed the greatest emphasis on basic discipline courses. Further analysis indicated that JU categorized HRM, organizational behavior, and management principles as basic discipline courses, whereas the other four institutions categorized these courses as specialty courses.

3.4. Credits dedicated to specialty courses, with SU and JU demonstrating the optimal performance

ZU, GUF, GU, JU, and SU respectively allocated 38.5 (accounting for 24.50% of the total graduation credits), 52 (33.55%), 49 (32.56%), 45 (28.13%), and 85 (60.71%) credits for specialty courses. GUF divided elective specialty courses into three learning modules. GU divided elective specialty courses into six learning modules and required each student to select at least two of these e modules and complete 10 or more credits in each of the modules (see Appendix 1). Accordingly, SU reserved the highest number of credits for specialty courses, whereas ZU reserved the fewest credits. The difference in required specialty credits between SU and ZU was 46.5 credits. SU did not designate basic discipline courses. When the basic discipline courses of other institutions are considered, JU required the highest number of credits (108; 67.50%), followed by SU. ZU still had the lowest relevant credits (65; 35%). The results

revealed that students majoring HRM at JU and SU had more opportunities for professional knowledge learning and training compared with their counterparts in other institutions.

3.5. Credits dedicated to practice courses, with ZU demonstrating the optimal performance

The practice course module included training courses, internship, social practice, and graduation thesis writing (design). ZU, GUF, GU, and SU respectively reserved 42 (accounting for 26.25% of the total graduation credits), 12 (7.74%), 22 (13.75%), and 12 (8.57%) credits for practice courses. JU incorporated the 11 credits for the practice curriculum into the 19 compulsory specialty credits. Of the 42 credits assigned to this category by ZU, 32 were divided among courses for academic essay writing, specialty internship, graduation internship, and graduation thesis writing (design). This allocation is 30 credits higher than that of GUF, the curriculum of which was also of a college level. Regarding the remaining 10 credits of ZU, the university divided courses, such as Recruitment and Hiring Internship, Training and Development, Remuneration Management, and Performance Management, into theory and practical sessions. For each practice course, one credit is provided. The other institutions considered these courses as one unit. Both theory and practice content are provided in one course.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Bipolarization in curriculum planning in terms of content richness

The curricula of HRM programs mainly consist of general education, basic discipline, specialty, and practice course modules. Under these four modules, compulsory and elective courses are provided. GUF provided 20 elective basic discipline courses with a total of 47 credits; the students were required to complete at least 18 credits. JU offered 43 elective basic discipline courses for a total of 85 credits. The courses were further divided into accounting, marketing, and tourism categories. The students were required to complete at least 4 credits in each category, totaling 12 credits for the three categories. Although the courses in these subcategories were not part of the core HRM professional talent cultivation curriculum, these categories included relevant professional courses. Most schools in China lack instructors for specialty courses, and few schools plan their curricula by considering the HRM specialties and contemporary competencies required by employers [8]. Although HRM core competencies emphasize six modules (human resources planning, recruitment and deployment, training and development, performance management, remuneration and welfare, and employee relationships) and the relevant knowledge is partially conveyed in elective courses, some institutions do not offer such courses. The courses are either removed or become unavailable courses that students cannot attend, even if they wanted to, to complete their professional HRM knowledge. These factors may be responsible for the acute lack of professional HRM knowledge in higher education institutions and the corresponding failure in adequate curriculum planning.

4.2. Bipolarization in curriculum planning in terms of content richness

Current undergraduate HRM professional talent cultivation curricula must include 140–160 credits to meet the regulations of the Ministry of Education. The number of credits required for general education, basic discipline, specialty, and practice courses by each institution is presented in Table 2. The number of credits in basic discipline and specialty course modules was 56 (35.00% of the total graduation credits), 91 (58.71%), 86.5 (57.48%), 108 (67.51%), and 85 (60.71%) credits for ZU, GUF, GU, JU, and SU, respectively. ZU allocated the fewest credits among the five institutions. Clarification is required on how the 56 (35.00%) credits standard was established, whether the standard could provide a complete and concrete knowledge foundation for HRM students, and what the theoretical basis of the standard was. Compared with the other four institutions, the regulations of ZU were unclear and incomplete in specifying the standard. Thus, the basic discipline course and specialty course credit regulations of GUF, GU, JU, and SU should be used when considering the specialty course credit planning of HRM programs.

ZU allocated 62 credits (accounting for 38.75% of the total graduation credits) for the general education course module, which was especially high. The general education and specialty courses were from different education units and planned separately. Inconsistencies between the courses are common because they are often developed by different teaching units. Thus, HRM specialty courses did not correspond with students' preferred general education course content. Such divergence prevented coordination between courses to form an integral curricular structure. Hence, compared with the credits and comprehensive disciplinary structures in other fields, ZU presented mediocre curriculum planning

in HRM professional cultivation.

ZU allocated 42 credits (accounting for 26.25% of the total graduation credits) for practice course modules, which was 1.9 to 3.5 times that of the other four institutions. Further analysis revealed that ZU offered six courses in four categories (essay I and II with 2 credits each, professional internship with 2 credits, graduation internship I and II with 9 credits each, and graduation thesis writing [design] with 8 credits), totaling 32 credits. GUF, also with an HRM curriculum of the college level, offered only three courses with 9 credits in the practice course module. GU, JU, and SU respectively provided four courses with 20 credits, two courses with 11 credits, and two courses with 8 credits. Although ZU offered superior internship and thesis practice content, whether the enhanced content would enable students to improve their understanding and internalize the professional knowledge content and help them meet enterprise needs is questionable. The apparent emphasis on practice courses was actually a consequence of the inclusion of essay and graduation internship courses with an excessive number of credits. Moreover, ZU allocated the fewest basic discipline and specialty course credits among the five institutions and divided one course into two courses for theory and practice separately. Why ZU divided practice courses into separate units; whether this approach helps improve students' abilities to a greater extent than the approaches followed by the other four institutions merits follow-up investigation.

Table 2: Credits of HRM Professional Talent Cultivation Course Modules and Proportions of Each Institution

Curriculum category	ZU (credit /proportion)	GUF (credit /proportion)	GU (credit /proportion)	JU (credit /proportion)	SU (credit /proportion)
General education module	62(38.75%)	52(33.55%)	42(27.91%)	47(29.38%)	39(27.86%)
Basic discipline module	17.5(10.94%)	39(25.16%)	37.5(24.92%)	63(39.38%)	
Specialty module	38.5(24.06%)	52(33.55%)	49(32.56%)	45(28.13%)	85(60.71%)
Practice module	42(26.25%)	12(7.74%)	22(14.62%)		12(8.57%)
Adaptive module				5(3.13%)	4(2.85%)

4.3. Elective systems causing fragmentation in professional knowledge

Elective courses promote active learning and self-awareness in students and prompt them to select their preferred specialty courses. This system conforms to the educational management system of contemporary education philosophy. However, students have the freedom to select the elective course they prefer. Thus, students may opt for courses that are easy to complete in consideration of their time allocation and learning loads. Students do not necessarily consider the comprehensiveness of their basic professional knowledge. GUF, GU, JU, and SU divided elective courses into specialty subcategories with corresponding requirements to address the problem of fragmented professional knowledge. However, ZU's curricula did not provide subcategories and neither provided students with the complete basic knowledge necessary for HRM professionals. Accordingly, students of GUF, GU, JU, and SU achieved higher HRM proficiencies in the specialty learning field compared with students from ZU.

4.4. Problems in the balance between conservatism and liberalism caused by international perspectives addressed in courses

HRM students are often viewed negatively by the general public and enterprises for their poor innovative abilities and narrow international perspective (Zhao et al., 2018). GUF, GU, JU, and SU developed relevant courses such as International Business Human Resources Management, International Business Negotiation, International Business Management, and Cross-cultural Management. However, ZU did not provide any course related to the international perspective in their HRM talent cultivation curriculum. ZU merely focused on the traditional six course modules of HRM and neglected its identity as a higher education institution in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macau Greater Bay Area, which is a world-class urban cluster and economic and industrial development zone. ZU has the obligation and responsibility to help society instead of being conservative. Students' HRM professional talent capacities and literacy must be developed comprehensively. Students must develop a basic understanding of the core knowledge of HRM disciplines and become familiar with social and economic development trends where human capital is regarded from a globalized viewpoint. Students' international perspective and data analysis abilities should also be prioritized. GUF, GU, JU, and SU planned curricula that conform to the internationalization requirements of the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macau Greater Bay Area,

enterprises' employee requirements, and students' employment competitiveness standards.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

5.1. Conclusion

Successful professional talent cultivation is indicative of the quality of higher education. If each HRM student acquires the necessary key knowledge before graduation, this suggests the education quality and curriculum quality have been considerably improved. The Ministry of Education requires discipline programs to set the graduation threshold at 140–160 credits, where the proportion of theoretical instruction credits shall not exceed 85% and the proportion of elective specialty and elective general education courses shall not be lower than 25% of the total; the practice credits shall also not be lower than 15% of the total credits. Higher educational institutions technically and formally conform to such basic requirements.

We found that in the development of specialty course modules, some institutions overemphasized the general education and practice course modules, with the proportion of total credits that these courses account for substantially exceeding the benchmark set by the Ministry of Education. Knowledge gaps develop as students progress from the general education courses to specialty courses and practice courses. The overall course structure may become compromised because of a skewed credit composition. Moreover, the lack of connection resulted in excessively high credits for practice courses and overly low credits for specialty courses. The general education courses not directly relevant to HRM specialties hindered development of complete and core HRM professional knowledge. Education aims to promote students' professional literacy. The negligence of the institutions, insufficiency in teaching resources, and inappropriate specialties offered resulted in graduates with insufficient proficiency. Such inadequacy has not only resulted in a high unemployment rate among new graduates but also reproach by social and mass media. Curriculum planning should avoid the cultivation of HRM talents with professionalism that lacks specialization or is in name only.

According to the curricula of the five institutions, GUF, GU, JU, and SU divided subcategories of specialties in elective courses and required the students to acquire relevant credits. This measure addressed the problem of fragmented knowledge inherent in the elective system, as well as students' difficulty in obtaining all relevant knowledge required for HRM professionals under the elective course structure. Compared with the other four institutions, ZU's undergraduate HRM professional curriculum was incomplete and lacked systematic projects for cultivating well-prepared professionals. The basic discipline and specialty course modules were scattered as fragmented knowledge bodies, and these courses could barely achieve the professional requirements from a comprehensive and integrated perspective. Therefore, students' capacity for working in different industries or understanding relevant field knowledge would be less than ideal.

We contend that crucial HRM professional knowledge should not be omitted in current curriculum planning and design; otherwise, the knowledge of students majoring in HRM would become unsatisfactory. Core and integrated HRM professional practice competencies should not be neglected by allocating few credits to such courses; otherwise, students' professional capacities may deteriorate. Moreover, practical and comprehensive HRM specialty knowledge systems should not be segmented without careful consideration or because of unfamiliarity with the specialty; such an approach would lead to student specialty knowledge becoming fragmented.

5.2. Suggestions

5.2.1. Adequately adjusted specialty course module

The required credits for the basic discipline course and specialty course modules should be adjusted so that they account for 60%–70% of the total credits. Course modules offering excessively high credits, such as the general education and specialty elective courses, should be adjusted to near the 25% proportion as regulated by the Ministry of Education. The internship and thesis writing courses with similar characteristics in practice course modules should be reduced to 15–20 credits to avoid fragmented specialty course planning and excessive inflation of credits. The basic social requirements for HRM talent competencies and practical teaching needs should be considered when adjusting the required credits and teaching hours according to the concrete needs of specialties; in this manner, students can be equipped with the abilities to convert into practice the course and specialty knowledge they have obtained.

5.2.2. Design of elective specialty subcategory core course modules

To avoid failure in taking elective courses because of student personal factors, specialty subcategories can be divided from elective courses, as is common practice at GUF, GU, JU, and SU. Because the required credits are regulated, students may focus on the specific professional knowledge they need to improve. Moreover, subcategory guidelines can be established to organize the knowledge and skill bases HRM students must possess after completing relevant courses. The sequential order of the courses should also be considered to avoid bias caused by students' personal consideration in course selection and the credit taking system. This approach is conducive to the gradual formation of a professional image for HRM courses.

5.2.3. Re-evaluation of specialty course module and connotations

Undergraduate HRM talent cultivation curriculum credit planning for each module should be supported with suitable theoretical foundations. Adjustment should be made on the basis of relevant research. HRM knowledge involving national focal industry development, internationalization, and digitalization is the crucial knowledge foundation of HRM. Knowledge courses should be planned properly and included in basic discipline course or specialty course modules. In current curriculum schedules, relevant courses and courses closely associated with practice should be adequately supplemented, eliminated, or organized into a new course category. In this manner, HRM students can obtain the necessary knowledge from educational situations.

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Appendix 1.

Comparison of HRM Professional Talent Cultivation Curriculum Categories and Organization of Five Institutions

Curriculum category	Course type/course cluster	ZU				GUF				GU				JU				SU				
		Number of courses	Number of credits	Required credits	Proportion (%)	Number of courses	Number of credits	Required credits	Proportion (%)	Number of courses	Number of credits	Required credits	Proportion (%)	Number of courses	Number of credits	Required credits	Proportion (%)	Number of courses	Number of credits	Required credits	Proportion (%)	
General education	Compulsory	12	42	42	26.25	15	32	32	20.63	16	28	28	18.60	14	31	31	19.38	14	33	33	23.57	
	Elective		24	20	12.50		20	20	12.90		7	14	9.30		16	16	10.00				6	4.29
Basic discipline	Compulsory	7	17.5	17.5	10.94	7	21	21	13.53	13	37.5	37.5	24.92	18	31	31	31.88					
	General elective					20	47	18	11.61													
	Elective													12	22	4	2.50					
	Accounting													13	26	4	2.50					
	Marketing													18	37	4	2.50					
Specialty	Compulsory	11	24	24	15.00	10	23	23	14.84	10	21	21	13.95	6	19	19	11.88	24	55	55	39.29	
	General elective	18	30.5	14.5	9.06	10	21	14	9.03					50	50	26	16.25					
	Specialty application					9	20	9	5.81													
	Occupational orientation							6	3.87													
	Innovation module									6	12											
	OB module									6	12											
	Marketing module									6	12											
	EC module									7	14											
	Commercial data module									6	12											
	Elective									41	79											
	Cross-discipline module																					
	Basic competencies of management																		10	19.5		
	Business expertise																		2	3.5		
	Employee motivation																		9	18		
	Strategic partner																		3	6		
Reform promoter																		6	11			
Practice	Specialty practice	17	45	36	22.50	9	12	12	7.74	9	22	22	14.62									
	Innovative and entrepreneurial practice	6	12	6	3.75													5	12	12	8.57	
Adaptive course																						
	Total	71	195	160	100.00	76	196	158	100.00	128	263.5	150.5	100.00	131	236	160	100.00	73	158	140	100.00	