

Curriculum Development and Practice of Gerontology under the Background of New Humanities

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Abstract: *This research delves into the augmentation of curriculum development and practical facets within the domain of gerontology under the New Humanities paradigm. It scrutinizes the historical evolution of gerontology courses, the current landscape of specialized courses, teaching materials, and the prevalent challenges faced in the implementation of gerontology undergraduate programs. Moreover, the study provides comprehensive recommendations for curriculum reform and development. Key focal points include the initiation of cross-disciplinary courses, the enhancement of faculty capacities, and the incorporation of innovative teaching methodologies. These strategic endeavors aim to foster a more all-encompassing and dynamic educational approach within the field of gerontology studies.*

Keywords: *Gerontology; Cross-disciplinary; Educational Reform; New Humanities*

1. Introduction

According to the 2020 Seventh National Population Census data in China, the population aged 60 and above numbered 264 million, accounting for 18.7% of the total population. Concurrently, China formally entered the aging stage in 2001 and is swiftly approaching the problem of transforming into a severely elderly society. With the fast development of an aging society, gerontology, as an emerging discipline, has attracted increased attention as a vital discipline of the twenty-first century, intending to proactively confront the problems provided by an aging population and resolve concerns in an aging society.

Gerontology, which began in the 1940s, was formally introduced to China in the 1980s. As the global economy and technological breakthroughs advanced, the share of the global senior population within the general population grew. This occurrence drew the attention of researchers from a variety of fields, including biomedical sciences, psychology, and sociology. Gerontology arose as a field of study to investigate the physiological, psychological, and social aspects of human aging.

Gerontology is currently classified as a core discipline within sociology and forms a component of the legal studies group. Gerontology is a comprehensive interdisciplinary field that focuses on the phenomena, processes, laws, and socioeconomic impacts of aging individuals and populations. It is the theoretical foundation and essential basis for actively addressing population aging^[1].

Gerontology was added as an undergraduate major by the Ministry of Education in 2019. Only three Chinese institutions currently offer undergraduate degrees in gerontology, filling a gap in professional research and education. Furthermore, on November 3, 2020, the Ministry of Education's New Humanities Construction Working Group issued the "Declaration on the Construction of New Humanities," which provides a thorough deployment of new humanities construction. Interdisciplinary integration is at the heart of modern humanities construction, with universities encouraged to offer interdisciplinary and practical courses to nurture students' cross-disciplinary knowledge integration and practical capacities^[2]. Therefore, gerontology, as an interdisciplinary field, holds significant academic and societal importance in training professionals and addressing China's aging population issues, based on research of undergraduate gerontology curriculum construction and practical pathways towards the background of new humanities.

2. Current Status of Gerontology Major Courses

2.1. Development History of Gerontology Discipline and Education

Gerontology is a comprehensive discipline that encompasses the natural sciences, social sciences, and behavioral sciences. It focuses on individual and population aging, necessitating collaborative and integrated research from multiple disciplines. This scientific discipline is distinguished by its scientific research methods, theoretical frameworks, and objective investigation of issues related to the elderly. It also provides service-oriented scientific decision-making. Gerontology addresses not only the biomedical aspects of individual aging, but also the demographic issues of the elderly from a social science perspective, making it a comprehensive discipline with both natural and social science components^[3]. Furthermore, its interdisciplinary nature extends beyond general theoretical frameworks to interdisciplinary branch sciences, as well as the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Gerontology aims to gain in-depth insights into the needs and support issues of the elderly, provide ample living conditions, and resources, and harness the potential of the elderly. Gerontology emerged as a critical discipline studying the physiological, psychological, and social changes of human aging in the context of global economic and technological progress^[4].

Gerontology, as a significant research direction in China, has gone through a development process that has included its establishment, initial development, and ongoing strengthening. Despite progress in disciplinary systems, professional settings, and research levels, there are still challenges such as lagging undergraduate teaching, imbalanced disciplinary structures, significant regional research level disparities, and limited international exchanges. In responding to the challenges of an aging society, the development of gerontology faces both opportunities and challenges. Current characteristics include a focus on teaching at the graduate and doctoral levels, insufficient development at the undergraduate level, and a noticeable trend of specialization and professionalization in vocational college teaching^[5].

2.2. Curriculum Content and Characteristics of the Gerontology Major for the 2021 Cohort

The core courses of this major include Introduction to Sociology, Introduction to Social Work, Introduction to Gerontology, Women's Studies, Social Gerontology, Social Survey Research Methods, Geriatric Physiology, Geriatric Psychology, Principles of Management, Community Home-Based Elderly Care, Management of Elderly Health Industries, Aging Service Institution Management, and more. There are also mandatory and elective courses available, such as Elderly Service Assessment, Management of the Elderly Health Industry, Management of Elderly Service Institutions, Elderly Social Work, Artificial Intelligence Applications in Elderly Care, Laws and Policies for the Elderly, Intelligent Elderly Care and Health Management, and so on. Service learning, social investigation, professional internships, and graduation internships are examples of practical teaching courses that emphasize the integration of empirical and humanistic methods, as well as the integration of theoretical learning and social practice.

Based on the course content listed above, it is evident that the current undergraduate gerontology major curriculum includes sociology, psychology, law, management, geriatrics, and artificial intelligence. In the field of sociology, eight modules are made up of foundational theoretical courses, and two modules are made up of courses related to social survey methods. Management courses are divided into four modules, while law, psychology, geriatrics, and artificial intelligence each have one gerontology course. The curriculum reflects the interdisciplinary nature of gerontology, with a major focus on social sciences and a minor emphasis on natural sciences.

Furthermore, the curriculum demonstrates three key features: (1) It is closely related to the current aging society's policy development, assisting students in gaining an in-depth understanding of the current situation as well as policies and regulations related to the aging population, as well as the foundational theoretical knowledge of gerontology. (2) While the curriculum includes various fields in the social and natural sciences, it does not delve deeply into each professional domain, focusing instead on knowledge related to the elderly in those fields, such as courses in geriatric physiology and geriatric psychology, emphasizing aspects of common diseases in the elderly and prevention. This approach assists students in broadening their understanding of elderly issues at various levels. (3) Management and application-related courses help students improve their organizational and managerial skills, allowing them to participate in practical applications of gerontology policies, research, management, planning, social services, assessment, legal affairs, and education and training in government, public institutions, social organizations, and relevant industries.

3. Challenges in the Development of Gerontology Discipline Courses in the Context of the New Humanities

3.1. The Existence of Disciplinary Barriers

Gerontology course development confronts numerous challenges, particularly in the context of the new humanities, which emphasizes the intersection and integration of disciplinary growth in order to disrupt established paradigms of thinking. The presence of disciplinary limitations is a critical concern. Despite the fact that the gerontology major curriculum encompasses a variety of fields, these restrictions retain the sociological aspect of the course content. Due to the existence of diverse disciplinary rules and independence, integrating knowledge from multiple disciplines has become a main obstacle, increasing the difficulty of teaching gerontology courses.

3.2. Insufficient Support Mechanisms

Universities' inflexible organizational structures and disciplinary boundaries make information exchange and collaboration challenging. Most departments are established in disciplinary divisions, which makes it difficult to share disciplinary resources. Traditional organizational structures make interdisciplinary collaboration challenging. Currently, despite the fact that gerontology courses cover numerous disciplines, achieving horizontal interdisciplinary resource sharing within the university is difficult. The majority of the instructors who teach the courses have backgrounds in demographics, sociology, and social work. As a result, the college's management and evaluation system must be more open and inclusive with the objective of encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration among various departments and teachers.

3.3. Requirements for Interdisciplinary Thinking among Teachers

Teachers of gerontology face challenges in developing interdisciplinary courses. This requirement extends beyond simply merging two or more courses; it requires teachers to have interdisciplinary thinking as well as a coherent knowledge structure. However, due to the traditional education model, most teachers have relatively single-disciplinary backgrounds, making cross-disciplinary integration challenging. Additionally, given the emerging nature of the elderly-related industries, instructors often lack relevant industry experience, leading to a potential disconnection between teaching content and the actual needs of the elderly industry. Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of gerontology major course development emphasizes higher demands on the teamwork of the teaching group, requiring improved interaction and cooperation with teachers from other disciplines. Gerontology professional education should not only focus on textbook knowledge, but also on the development of practical skills.

4. Future Direction

4.1. Establishing interdisciplinary research mechanisms to facilitate collaboration among different disciplines and enhance the teaching standards of gerontology

Interdisciplinary course development should go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, concentrating on problem- or project-oriented techniques to build an open, multidimensional, and inclusive curriculum framework. Simultaneously, increasing disciplinary resource sharing and developing interdisciplinary research should be supported through a variety of channels, such as collaborations inside the institution, collaborations with enterprises, or collaborations between organizations. It is critical to provide incentive mechanisms that encourage teachers to provide pupils with multidisciplinary, diversified, and comprehensive development platforms.

4.2. A focus on the development of the gerontology discipline requires the formation of a teaching team

Teachers' roles in the context of the new humanities have to change from traditional knowledge providers to guides, organizers, and facilitators of student learning activities. Interdisciplinary teaching training, research on teaching reform, and quality assessment of teaching can all help to improve teachers' interdisciplinary teaching capabilities and literacy. It is critical to build interdisciplinary course teaching teams, diverse teaching teams oriented toward problems or projects, encourage

collaboration between teaching teams from various disciplines, and promote the flow of teaching staff. Teachers should incorporate practical cases into their lectures, balancing fundamental knowledge with practical applications, and developing a "teach-produce-study-apply" teaching model. Encouraging professional teachers to actively participate in the development of the elderly industry, as well as conducting field surveys to supplement education with practical examples, should be considered. Furthermore, the introduction of industry elites with extensive practical experience can leverage the advantages of both university teachers and industry teachers, forming an integrated force in teaching theoretical knowledge and practical skills in gerontology.

4.3. Gerontology discipline development requires innovation in teaching methods, approaches, and evaluation systems

To guide students in acquiring essential information skills and literacy for the new era, teachers must innovate teaching methods by incorporating modern technological achievements into classroom teaching. Adopting teaching methods that combine online and offline teaching and complement theoretical and practical teaching is critical. It is essential for assessing teachers and students to build a multidimensional evaluation system that includes in-depth interviews, questionnaires, teaching competitions, and the evaluation of teaching documents. The emphasis on both procedural and results-oriented evaluation, as well as the use of teaching platforms for auxiliary recording of the teaching process, will help to improve the quality and level of gerontology discipline development.

5. Conclusions

This article investigates the difficulties encountered in developing undergraduate gerontology courses in the context of the New Humanities and proposes solutions. The core philosophy of New Humanities construction emphasizes interdisciplinary courses and encourages universities to offer them. However, as a typical interdisciplinary major, gerontology still faces issues in course development, such as disciplinary barriers, a lack of support for interdisciplinary integration, and the need for interdisciplinary thinking among specialized teachers. To address these challenges, measures such as developing and designing interdisciplinary courses, improving teacher training, enriching teaching methods, and establishing an evaluation system must be implemented. These measures have the potential to improve the quality of undergraduate gerontology courses while also addressing a number of issues arising from the rapid development of an aging society.

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