

Psychology Curriculum and Teaching Based on the Student-Centered Approach

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Abstract: This paper discusses how to construct psychology curriculum and teaching based on a student-centered approach in Chinese universities. The traditional teacher-centered model often limits students' active participation and engagement in the learning process. By shifting the focus to the student-centered approach, we can better cater to students' individual needs, enhance their learning outcomes, and foster their personal and professional development. This paper explores various strategies for implementing student-centered reforms in psychology education, including curriculum design, teaching methods, assessment practices, and the integration of technology. The ultimate goal is to create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that empowers students to become active learners and critical thinkers in the field of psychology.

1. Introduction

Psychology education plays a crucial role in preparing students for a career in the field of psychology and equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills for personal and professional growth. However, the traditional teacher-centered approach often fails to fully engage students and meet their diverse learning needs. To address this issue, a student-centered approach has emerged as a promising alternative, emphasizing active learning, collaboration, and individualized instruction. In this paper, we explore the rationale and benefits of adopting a student-centered approach in psychology curriculum and teaching.

The autonomy of students is the core and foundation for achieving the goals of all teaching activities. The fundamental task of higher education institutions is talent cultivation, and the evaluation of educational quality ultimately depends on students' learning and development^[1]. Currently, the concept of undergraduate education in Chinese universities is transitioning from "teacher-centered" to "student-centered," but in specific teaching processes, there is still a tendency to rely on traditional teaching methods. However, talent cultivation should not only focus on "teaching well" but also on the importance of students "learning well," stimulating students' interest and potential for learning, enhancing their sense of social responsibility, innovative spirit, and practical abilities, in order to cultivate qualified talents for the country and society. Therefore, one of the important measures to improve the quality of undergraduate education is to transform the teaching model from the traditional "classroom, teacher, textbook" centered on the teacher to the "student,

learning, learning process" centered on the student^[2,3].

With the development of modern society, mental health plays an increasingly important role in individual and social development. At the same time, all human activities stem from psychological activities, and psychology has significant implications for understanding and promoting benign social life, consumer economy, youth education, marriage and family, and other macro and micro fields. Therefore, today's society requires a large number of psychology professionals with excellent professional abilities, and undergraduate education in psychology in higher education institutions bears a great responsibility.

2. The Student-Centered Approach in Psychology Education

The student-centered approach in psychology education is an instructional methodology that places the student at the center of the learning process, shifting away from the traditional teacher-centered model. This approach recognizes the significance of learner autonomy, active engagement, and individualized learning in promoting a meaningful educational experience. In a student-centered classroom, instructors assume the role of facilitators, guiding students through critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative activities to construct their own understanding of psychological concepts. This approach acknowledges the diverse backgrounds, interests, and learning styles of students, aiming to accommodate these individual differences^[4-6].

The student-centered approach offers several advantages over the traditional teacher-centered model. Firstly, it fosters active learning by encouraging students to engage with the material through hands-on activities, discussions, and problem-solving exercises. This active involvement enhances comprehension and retention of concepts. Furthermore, the student-centered approach values and accommodates individual differences and diverse learning styles, allowing students to learn at their own pace and in ways that align with their preferences. This personalized learning experience promotes a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, the student-centered approach cultivates critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills, which are essential in the field of psychology. By actively engaging with the subject matter, students can apply psychological theories and concepts to real-life scenarios, fostering the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Finally, this approach nurtures transferable skills, such as effective communication, collaboration, and self-reflection, which are highly valued in both academic and professional contexts^[3,6,7].

3. Shortcomings of Traditional Undergraduate Education in Psychology

Traditional undergraduate education in psychology has some biases and shortcomings. Firstly, it emphasizes theoretical teaching while neglecting practical aspects. Traditional psychology education typically emphasizes the imparting of theoretical knowledge while overlooking the cultivation of students' ability to apply these theories to practical situations. Students lack practical experience and skills, making it difficult for them to apply the theoretical knowledge they have learned to problem-solving and practical work. Secondly, due to the core focus of modern Western scientific psychology on empirical research methods and a micro perspective, and the basic concentration of psychological counseling on exploring individual psychological issues, the entire discipline of psychology pays little attention to social reality. Thirdly, in traditional psychology education, classroom teaching is limited to knowledge theory, lacking guidance and cultivation of students' scientific and academic interests, resulting in students lacking a correct understanding and appreciation of the discipline, and insufficient interest. Fourthly, psychology is a discipline that originated in the West, and its textbooks and teaching methods are mostly based on Western approaches, with little consideration for local and multicultural factors. Fifthly, the practical application of psychology often requires the integration of

theories, methods, and knowledge from other disciplines to have a real impact on society. However, traditional psychology education tends to focus solely on the field of psychology itself, lacking interdisciplinary integration with other subjects, and rarely introducing students to the situation, methods, and research topics of other disciplines. In fact, psychology is closely related to many other disciplines, such as education, sociology, neuroscience, etc., but traditional psychology education often fails to provide opportunities for comprehensive interdisciplinary discussions and learning. Finally, traditional psychology education typically adopts a single classroom teaching model, emphasizing teacher-centered instruction and passive student reception, lacking interactive and cooperative learning opportunities. This teaching model limits the development of students' initiative and creative thinking.

4. The Teaching Goals of Student-centered Psychology Courses

Based on the characteristics of psychology, the teaching of psychology should outline the course goals from three aspects: knowledge, practical skills, and thinking. First, in terms of knowledge, through course teaching, students should be able to grasp the basic concepts, theoretical knowledge, and methods of psychology. In terms of practical skills, students should acquire the ability to apply what they have learned in class to practice, such as conducting scientific research related to psychology using experimental and questionnaire methods, engaging in psychological counseling, and analyzing social events using knowledge from social psychology and educational psychology. At the same time, they should be encouraged to actively participate in social practices and public welfare activities, using their professional skills to help others and serve society. In terms of thinking, through course teaching, students should be prompted to pay attention to society, develop a sense of social responsibility, think about social issues from a psychological perspective, and develop an awareness of using psychology to serve society and help others. The aim is to enhance students' passion for psychology, cultivate their scientific thinking and interest in scientific research, and establish and cultivate students' correct ethical values regarding scientific research. Students should be guided to pay attention to Chinese culture and Chinese issues, as well as to respect and appreciate psychological differences and diversity in different cultural backgrounds, fostering an open and inclusive mindset and increasing understanding and respect for multiculturalism.

5. Strategies for Implementing Student-Centered Approach

5.1 Curriculum Design

Curriculum design plays a crucial role in implementing student-centered reforms in psychology education. The curriculum should be designed to offer flexibility and choice, allowing students to explore topics of interest within the field of psychology. This can be achieved by offering a range of elective courses and interdisciplinary options. Additionally, the curriculum should be aligned with the learning outcomes and competencies expected from psychology graduates. It should provide a balance between core foundational knowledge and specialized areas, ensuring that students acquire a comprehensive understanding of the discipline ^[8].

5.2 Active Learning Strategies

Active learning strategies are essential for engaging students in the learning process ^[6,9]. In a student-centered approach, instructors should incorporate various active learning techniques such as group discussions, case studies, role-playing, and problem-solving activities. By employing these strategies, educators facilitate the development of critical thinking skills, foster collaboration among

students, and encourage the application of theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios. By actively involving students in their learning, instructors can enhance their understanding and retention of psychological principles and theories.

5.3 Technology Integration

Integrating technology into the learning environment can greatly enhance student-centered reforms in psychology education. Instructors can utilize online resources, virtual simulations, and multimedia materials to provide interactive and engaging learning experiences. Technology can also facilitate self-paced learning and individualized instruction, allowing students to explore topics at their own pace and revisit materials as needed. Additionally, the integration of technology tools can promote collaboration and communication among students, enabling them to connect and engage in virtual discussions and group projects.

5.4 Assessment Methods

Assessment methods should align with the student-centered approach, focusing on evaluating students' understanding, critical thinking skills, and application of knowledge^[6,10]. Moving away from traditional exams, instructors can implement a variety of assessment methods such as projects, presentations, portfolios, and reflective journals. These methods provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding and skills in diverse ways, promoting deeper engagement and reflection. Instructors should provide timely and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and growth.

5.5 Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning and peer interaction are integral components of the student-centered approach^[1,4]. Instructors should create opportunities for students to work together in group projects, discussions, and problem-solving activities^[9]. Peer interaction allows students to exchange ideas, perspectives, and knowledge, fostering a sense of community and promoting social learning. Instructors can facilitate this by assigning group tasks, promoting effective communication and teamwork, and providing guidance to ensure equal participation and contribution from all students.

By implementing these strategies for curriculum design, active learning, technology integration, assessment methods, and collaborative learning, educators can effectively implement student-centered reforms in psychology education. These strategies create an inclusive and dynamic learning environment that empowers students to take ownership of their learning, develop critical thinking skills, and apply psychological knowledge to real-world contexts.

6. Teaching Design based on the Student-centered Approach

Firstly, a student-centered psychology classroom can be established. In a student-centered classroom, teacher can create a positive learning environment that is supportive and interactive. Students will be encouraged to actively participate in discussions, ask questions, and share their viewpoints. Moreover, an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation will be cultivated. Teachers should act as guides and motivators, stimulating students' learning motivation and interest. In the context of classroom teaching, it is important to enhance theme-oriented and task-oriented activities. Additionally, students are encouraged to engage in supplementary reading outside of class, promoting in-depth learning and critical thinking. Furthermore, teachers encourage active learning, active discussion, and expression of opinions in classroom.

Secondly, diverse teaching methods and modes can be employed, with a focus on encouraging students' active participation and fostering cooperative learning. This approach will increase students' engagement in the classroom and promote mutual growth in teaching and learning. Various activities, such as group discussions, book clubs, problem-solving projects, experiments, and research tasks, can be utilized to cultivate students' critical thinking, analytical skills for real-life events, problem-solving abilities, creativity, and teamwork skills.

Thirdly, practice and application should be at the core of teaching, guiding students to participate in research practices related to psychological topics during classroom learning. To achieve this, teachers can incorporate teaching methods such as experimental exercises, case analysis, field internships, and simulated scenarios. These methods enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical problem-solving and real-world situations. Additionally, teaching should emphasize the cultivation of practical knowledge and career development skills. To align with actual career demands, courses can provide practical projects, internship opportunities, and career planning guidance. This will enable students to smoothly transition into employment after graduation and effectively adapt to workplace demands.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary integration. Teachers can encourage the integration of psychology education with other disciplines such as education, sociology, and neuroscience, and promote communication and cooperation between disciplines, broaden students' disciplinary perspectives, and cultivate comprehensive thinking and problem-solving abilities.

Finally, incorporate ideological and political elements into the curriculum. In classroom teaching, teachers guide students to pay attention to social reality, emphasize local culture and multiculturalism. By curriculum, teachers can integrate a multicultural perspective and the importance of social justice into teaching content and methods. Universities can increase relevant courses and content on cross-cultural psychology and multicultural education, encourage students to understand the psychological needs and experiences of different cultures and groups, and cultivate cross-cultural communication and social justice awareness.

7. Challenges and Considerations in Implementing Student-Centered Teaching

7.1 Faculty Training and Support

Implementing student-centered reforms in psychology education requires adequate training and support for faculty members. Many instructors may be accustomed to a traditional teacher-centered approach and may require guidance in transitioning to a facilitator role^[11]. Training programs can provide faculty with the necessary pedagogical skills, strategies, and resources to effectively implement student-centered practices. Ongoing support, such as mentoring, peer collaboration, and professional development opportunities, can further enhance faculty members' ability to integrate student-centered approaches into their teaching practices.

7.2 Resistance to Change

Resistance to change can be a significant challenge when implementing student-centered reforms^[12,13]. Both faculty members and students may exhibit resistance due to familiarity with traditional teaching methods or concerns about the effectiveness of new approaches. To address this challenge, open communication and dialogue are essential. Faculty members should engage in transparent conversations with their colleagues and students, explaining the rationale behind the reforms and the potential benefits. Providing evidence and examples of successful implementations of student-centered approaches can help alleviate concerns and build support for the change.

7.3 Balancing Content and Process

One of the considerations in implementing student-centered reforms is finding the right balance between content coverage and the process of student-centered learning. While it is important to ensure that students acquire the necessary foundational knowledge in psychology, it is equally crucial to provide ample opportunities for active learning, critical thinking, and application of concepts. Curriculum planning should involve careful consideration of the core content that needs to be covered, while also allowing flexibility for student exploration and engagement. Prioritizing essential competencies and learning outcomes can help strike a balance between content and process, ensuring that students develop a deep understanding of psychology while actively participating in their own learning.

8. Case Studies and Best Practices in Implementing Student-Centered approach

8.1 Experiential Learning Opportunities

Experiential learning opportunities are a valuable component of student-centered teaching in psychology education. Case studies provide students with real-life scenarios to analyze and apply psychological concepts. Through case-based learning, students engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making, enhancing their understanding of psychological theories and their practical application. Instructors can incorporate case studies into classroom discussions, group activities, or even field experiences, allowing students to actively participate in their own learning and develop skills that are transferable to real-world contexts.

8.2 Individualized Instruction and Mentorship

Individualized instruction and mentorship are key elements of student-centered reforms. Recognizing that students have unique learning styles, interests, and needs, instructors can provide personalized guidance and support. This can be achieved through one-on-one meetings, feedback sessions, or mentorship programs. Individualized instruction allows instructors to tailor their teaching methods and resources to meet each student's specific requirements, promoting a deeper understanding of psychology and fostering a sense of ownership over their learning journey. Mentorship programs further enhance student engagement and provide opportunities for students to receive guidance from experienced professionals in the field.

8.3 Community Engagement and Service-Learning

Community engagement and service-learning initiatives offer students practical opportunities to apply psychological knowledge and skills in real-world settings. By engaging with the community, students can gain a deeper understanding of the societal impact of psychology and develop a sense of social responsibility. Service-learning projects can involve collaborating with community organizations or conducting research that addresses community needs. These experiences not only enhance students' understanding of psychology but also cultivate empathy, cultural competence, and ethical awareness. Community engagement and service-learning initiatives foster a sense of purpose and connection, making the learning experience more meaningful and relevant for students.

9. Feedback and Reflection

Feedback and reflection are vital components of the evaluation process in student-centered reforms.

Regular feedback allows instructors to assess students' progress, identify areas of improvement, and provide constructive guidance. Instructors can incorporate various feedback mechanisms such as formative assessments, peer evaluations, and self-assessments. Timely, specific, and actionable feedback is essential in the student-centered approach, as it facilitates student growth by highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. Such feedback should be provided promptly after an assessment or learning activity, enabling students to make immediate connections between their performance and the associated criteria. Specific feedback offers clear guidance, pinpointing specific aspects of the student's work that require attention or improvement. By providing actionable feedback, instructors offer concrete suggestions or strategies for students to enhance their learning and performance. This type of feedback empowers students to take an active role in their own development and progress. Reflective activities, such as journaling or group discussions, enable students to critically analyze their learning process, identify challenges, and set goals for improvement. By incorporating feedback and reflection, instructors can continuously enhance the effectiveness of their student-centered practices.

Data-driven decision making plays a crucial role in evaluating and improving student-centered reforms in psychology education. Collecting and analyzing data allows instructors to gain insights into the effectiveness of various instructional strategies, interventions, and assessments. Quantitative data, such as test scores or course evaluations, can provide objective measures of student learning outcomes and satisfaction. Qualitative data, such as student feedback or focus group discussions, offer valuable insights into students' experiences, perceptions, and suggestions for improvement. By analyzing these data, instructors can identify areas of success and areas that require adjustment. This information informs evidence-based decision making, allowing instructors to tailor their instructional practices, curriculum design, and assessment methods to better meet students' needs and optimize learning outcomes.

10. Conclusion

In light of the issues with traditional teaching methods in psychology, there is a need for innovation and reform to drive the development of psychology education. This includes a greater emphasis on practicality, interdisciplinary integration, multiculturalism, and social justice, while also highlighting career development orientation. Diverse teaching methods and approaches should be adopted, encouraging active student participation and collaborative learning. By constructing a student-centered teaching model, students become active participants and agents, which enhances the quality of psychology courses and sparks students' interest in learning. Psychology education can better adapt to the needs of modern society and students by cultivating professionals with practical skills, interdisciplinary thinking, and a sense of social responsibility.

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