Students’ perception of Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum in Fudan

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Introduction

According to the document issued by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CPC and Ministry of Education in 2005, all the universities in China should offer Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum to promote students’ understanding of Communism and to cultivate students’ sense of patriotism. In respond to the policy, Fudan University also requires its students to take several courses offered by the Department of Social Science, including *Ideological and moral cultivation and legal basis* and *Introduction to basic principle of Marxism*. However, despite the importance and necessity of ideological and political education, it seems that students generally show negative attitudes toward this type of courses.

Numerous researches have been done by scholars to improve the construction of high school ideological and political curriculum. It has been pointed out that Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum was severely challenged by the development of market economy, that the teaching material was frequently repeated in other lessons (Zuobin Miao, 1995)\(^1\) and that traditional way of doctrinal and dogmatical indoctrination can no longer keep up with the time (Ruan Xingguang, Xiong Wenyu, & Ye Yonghong, 1997)\(^2\).

These researches are of great importance for us to gain a birds-eye view of the evolution of the curriculum and the challenges lying ahead. Up to date, however, the

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previous researches were mainly teacher-oriented. Consequently students’ voices about it were often ignored. Moreover, those researches were most carried out in the last century, which means part of their conclusions may not match the current situation any more. The paper intends to investigate students’ perception of Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum in Fudan University at present. A questionnaire was carried out in more than fifty students in Fudan. Based on the data analysis, this paper may put forward some constructive suggestions for both teachers and students.

The following parts of the paper include research methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion. Hopefully this student-oriented research would shed light on the dilemma of university-level political courses and help the construction of the curriculum.

**Research Methodology**

With the purpose of narrowing down the problem that we focus on, this study was divided into two parts. In the initial stage of instrument development, an interview of students’ basic attitudes toward Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum was carried out. Fifteen students were randomly picked up in the library and asked five questions to obtain a more scientific result that could be used to deduce the overall situation. Two of the five questions concerned students’ general evaluation of the courses and their performance at the class. The other three questions were variable, partly depending on students’ former answers.

In the second stage questionnaires were used, which covered ten questions, including teachers’ role in the teaching process, the content of teaching materials and students’ personal emotions involved. This questionnaire was distributed to sixty subjects ranging from freshmen to senior students through random sampling, and all the papers were successfully collected. Three of them were not completed so that only fifty-seven samples were used in the data analysis.
Findings

In the interview stage, the first question was raised to investigate students’ overall evaluation of Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum. Eighty-one point twenty-five percent students showed no interest and two of them even expressed intense dislike to those courses. Only three of all the interviewees gave relatively positive valuation. Another question concerning students’ performance in class held consistent with the former question. Most students chose to use the class time doing their own business, including browsing news, doing subject assignment, or online chatting. Few students would attentively follow the teacher through the whole lesson. When it comes to the reasons behind their behaviour, students’ answers can be observed from several aspects listed below: the way of teaching, the content of teaching material and personal reasons such as peer pressure and personal interest.

Considering the severe fact that most students held negative attitudes toward Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum, the following self-administered questionnaire mainly put its focus on the reasons why Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum experienced such frustration among nowadays’ students. A high proportion of students considered that textbooks were too dull to intrigue interest as the biggest problem of teaching material (useless=26%, dull=48%, difficult=15%, else=11%, see table 1). When it comes to teachers’ performance, forty-nine percent of the students reported that the biggest problem lied in the way concepts were explained. (monotonous teaching method=37%; not sufficient knowledge background=9%; pale explanations=49%, else=5%, see table 2). Other factors which might affect the quality of Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum include peer pressure (55%), personally no interest (68%), lack of incentive mechanism (87%) and time arrangement (13%) (Multiple choice). Students were also required to grade material and teaching separately within a range from one to five points. It turned out that both of the two indexes failed to reach the average score (material=2.23, teaching=2.58, average=3).
In the end of the questionnaire an open question was raised to acquire some constructive suggestion and this would be concluded in the last part of the paper.

**The Biggest Problem of Materials (table 1)**

- Useless, 26%
- Dull, 48%
- Difficult, 15%
- Else, 11%

**The Biggest Problem of Teaching (table 2)**

- Explanation, 49%
- Knowledge background, 9%
- Teaching method, 37%
- Else, 5%

**Discussion:**

In comparison with a research carried out by Ruan Xingguang, Xiong Wenyu and Ye Yonghong in 1997, it was out of my expectation that students’ reasons for disliking

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Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum were almost the same, which means teaching method and teaching material has not been much improved in the last two decades. And what was more shocking was the fact that the degree of satisfaction for those courses suffered a sharp drop from 81.5% to 18.75%. This dramatic downfall brings forward a crucial question to us, “What is it that has pushed Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum into such crisis?” Analyses of macro-environment and micro-environment might give us an insight into this question.

**Macro-environment Analysis**

The history of the People’s Republic of China can be roughly divided into two parts, the conservative period before Reform and Open and the modern time after. As a group stood in front of the whole society, university students made their quick response to the change by challenging the old system and their dissatisfaction for Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum was a part of this. At first it was a rebound from long-time oppression, merely to voice their minds and to test their existence as an independent individual. However, as Reform and Openness goes deeper, they start to skeptically inquire the trueness of collectivism and communism; they start to doubt Marx’s and Lenin’s theory and they start to absorb plenty of information as well as different values. It is no hard to understand why Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum is losing its charm day by day.

**Micro-environment Analysis**

In a world of diversified values, it is becoming more and more difficult to stick to one’s own belief, and this could be extremely true in student groups, where peer pressure is pushing them to do what others’ do. That’s to say, when other students are sleeping or talking in class, it would be weird of you to listen attentively. This kind of unreasonable imitation is making the situation worse because political education would fall into a vicious circle. As bad attitude creates bad attitude, we have to put tremendous effort to stop this process.
Pressure on the Course

Environmental factors certainly play a role in the dilemma of the subject, however, we cannot ignore the pressure exists in the course itself. Although those problems such as teachers’ performance and teaching materials are much easier to control and change than environmental influence, the course still bears heavy burden. First of all, the nature of the curriculum itself confines materials to be used in the course. The purpose of Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum is to shape students’ ideas and behaviors, thus variety is viewed as an obstacle. Secondly, the change of textbooks follows a complicated procedure. Application, choosing, revision, checking and reprinting, each stage requires time and energy, which makes the text books always lag behind the time. What’s more, the out-of-date content consequently confines teachers’ performance in class. For instance, they cannot use hot topics to attract students, nor can they introduce concepts that deviate the mainstream ideology. All those confinements mentioned above put pressure on the development of Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum. No wander satisfaction for the course falls dramatically.

Conclusion

The paper conducted a research on students’ perception of Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum in Fudan university through interview and questionnaire. Eighty one point twenty five percent (81.25%) of the interviewees expressed negative attitude towards Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum, which caused our curiosity of the reasons behind. According to the questionnaire, students’ dissatisfaction mainly focused on:

- The dullness of teaching materials
- The paleness of teachers’ explanation
- The pressure from other students’ attitude

After comparing with the report of other researchers, we found that the awkward situation was the result of joint forces of several factors:
- The macro-environment of reform and open
- The micro-environment of peer pressure
- The fixed character of the course itself
- The complicated procedure of changing

After reviewing the problems in the course and the driving factors behind, it concludes that a reform of Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum should be made. The following constructive suggestions might be helpful to solve those existing problems.

- **Small Classes.** Too many students make interaction impossible and teachers are forced to take charge of the whole lesson. Thus big classes should be divided into small classes, so that students would have more chance to express their viewpoints.

- **Social Practice.** Ideological and political education should go out of campus to the society. Politics was rooted in society and would be applied to society. Therefore social practice should always be a part of the education process.

- **Various Reading Materials.** Teaching materials of pure theory should be adapted to the students’ preference. Although textbooks had better maintain a degree of profession and seriousness, other reading materials can vary in forms and contents.

All the points mentioned above have given us an overall understanding of Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum, but there is still much work to be done to achieve a deeper insight into the construction of the course. As long as educators and students join their hands and strive together, there is no doubt that Marxist-Leninist-based curriculum will be welcomed again by all the students.
References: