

# An Analysis of Holistic Education Models in Mainland China's Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study of College English Curriculum

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## Abstract

Over the last four decades, the field of education in mainland China has seen sustained and stable growth. However, the very essence of education has undergone significant changes. In the era spanning from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, the primary aim of education was to serve economic construction and modern development, with a clear emphasis on utilitarian and instrumental characteristics. By the late 1990s, there was a shift towards advocating for quality education that prioritizes the comprehensive development of individuals, gradually embracing the concept of holistic education across the Chinese mainland. College English courses, mandatory for all non-English major undergraduates at Chinese universities, stand as a pivotal component of general education. Amidst the extensive backdrop of educational reform and development in mainland China, college English curriculum have experienced profound changes. The “*College English Curriculum Guidelines (2020)*” recently released by the Ministry of Education highlights that college English courses possess both instrumental and humanistic dimensions. The instrumental aspect is demonstrated through enhancing students’ comprehensive abilities in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating English, while its humanistic core is rooted in a people-oriented approach that celebrates human values and emphasizes the cultivation of comprehensive qualities and overall development. This paper aims to explore the practical model of implementing holistic education within college English curriculum, adhering to the specific requirements of *the 2020 guidelines*, across four dimensions: curriculum system, instructional approaches, educational resources, and faculty strength.

**Keywords:** holistic education, college English courses, “College English Curriculum Guidelines (2020)”

## 1. Introduction

Holistic education, as a pivotal educational philosophy, has its intellectual roots extending back to the era of Aristotle in ancient Greece. Aristotle’s discourse on liberal education intrinsically reflects the foundational principles of holistic education, aiming to cultivate not merely academically proficient individuals but well-rounded human beings. This educational ideal finds resonance in the natural education theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who advocated for an education system that aligns with the inherent nature of humans, emphasizing growth and learning that is as organic as it is comprehensive. Since the advent of the modern era, the rise of holistic education has emerged as a critical response to the prevailing educational practices that were deeply rooted in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. This period was characterized by an education system that predominantly embraced utilitarianism, materialism, and an instrumental approach to learning, underscored by a marked bureaucratic oversight. In stark contrast, holistic education proposes a paradigm shift towards developing an educational theory that is deeply imbued with life consciousness, embracing a broad, integrated perspective that includes ecological awareness, a global viewpoint, and a universal vision. This approach underscores the importance of fostering an interconnectedness among educational content and experiences, thereby nurturing individuals who are comprehensively developed (Zhang, 2008).

In the Eastern cultural milieu, particularly in Japan during the 20th century’s second and third decades, the holistic education ideology found a fertile ground, significantly shaped by the educational philosophies of Obara Kuniyoshi. Obara envisaged an educational framework that encompasses a comprehensive range of human cultural dimensions: scholarly knowledge, moral integrity, artistic sensibility, religious spirituality, physical wellness, and practical life skills. It is only through achieving a balanced and harmonious development across these varied domains—truth (science), goodness (morality), beauty (art), sanctity (religion), health (physical well-being), and prosperity (life) — that one can

attain the stature of a truly “whole person” (Obara, 1993). Despite the subjective idealist tint in Obara’s holistic education philosophy, his educational aspirations were profoundly noble. His vision for holistic education has notably contributed to the theoretical foundations of the “holistic education” movement globally, especially during the 1980s, marking a significant chapter in the discourse on educational reform and practice aimed at nurturing fully developed individuals.

In the Western world, particularly throughout the 1960s and 1970s, a notable group of American educational theorists, who took inspiration from and furthered the development of humanistic theories of education, laid the groundwork for and expanded upon a series of learning theories. The theories proposed by this group of American educational theorists were fundamentally centered around the comprehensive concept of “the complete development of an individual”. Their educational theories underscored the critical importance of focusing on nurturing various aspects of an individual’s development, including but not limited to their intellectual capabilities, social skills, creative potentials, aesthetic appreciation, moral sensibilities, and deeply held personal values within the educational process.

Ron Miller articulated a philosophy based on the notion that holistic education should fundamentally revolve around the principle that every individual, by fostering meaningful connections with their community, the natural environment, and embracing spiritual values such as compassion and peace, has the opportunity to uncover their own identity, discern the meaning and purpose of their life, and recognize their goals within the grand tapestry of existence (Miller, 1997).

By 1990, the holistic education movement saw a significant milestone when eighty scholars, unified in their support for holistic education, came together to sign the “*EDUCATION 2000: A Holistic Perspective*”, further solidifying the movement’s impact and reach. Following this declaration, the holistic education movement rapidly expanded beyond North America, finding resonance in Asia, Oceania, and other regions worldwide. This expansion had a profound and lasting impact on educational institutions of all types, fostering a widespread dissemination of the holistic education philosophy.

## 2. The Essence of Holistic Education

Through the historical and societal context in which the holistic education movement emerged, it becomes evident that holistic education movement endeavors to redesign the curriculum system with an ecological worldview, representing a reflective stance on both the crisis in institutionalized education and broader societal crises. Holistic education emphasizes that thinking and learning constitute a systematic process, underscoring the concepts of “wholeness” and “interconnectedness”. It aims to set educational objectives towards establishing egalitarian and open teacher-student relationships and learning communities, thereby fostering the development of a “whole person” who is harmoniously balanced. The “whole person” as conceived by holistic education refers to an individual who achieves comprehensive development across various dimensions including intellect, emotion, physicality, social relations, aesthetics, and spirituality. Such an individual is described as a complex, interconnected system that encompasses a variety of capabilities, potentials, and creative energies (Miller, 2000). In essence, holistic education focuses on the “complete person”, which involves the integration of the body, mind, spirit, and soul, along with the cultivation of imagination, creativity, and multiple intelligences. It emphasizes that individuals can attain self-awareness and wholeness by connecting with oneself, the community, and the world at large. The holistic person is not seen as an “incomplete half-person” who exists merely as a “tool or machine” but is recognized as a true individual who experiences coordinated development in physiological and psychological aspects, intellectual and non-intellectual capacities, and emotional and volitional dimensions.

Holistic education is not merely a specific curriculum or methodology but represents an entire set of educational philosophies and concepts. It transcends narrow utilitarianism and functionalism, emphasizing the comprehensive and integrated development of individuals. It highlights the importance of diversity among individuals, promotes cooperation between experiences and individuals, and underscores the harmonious development of people with society, nature, and humanity itself, aiming to cultivate “whole persons” or “complete individuals” with “relationships” at its core. The main contents of holistic education can be summarized into six aspects: pursuing the comprehensive development of individuals, seeking understanding among humans and the true meaning of life, emphasizing the cultivation of students’ humanistic spirit, encouraging interdisciplinary interaction and integration of knowledge, advocating for a balance between the spiritual and material worlds of students, focusing on the harmony and pleasure of life, and fostering global citizens with integrative thinking (Tan & Fan, 2006). Therefore, the core idea of holistic education lies in the transformation of educational and training objectives, leading to a series of changes in curriculum design, instructional approaches, and teacher-student relationships. The hallmark of holistic education is its emphasis on “wholeness”, which not only means nurturing comprehensive qualities in individuals but also implies a broad and profound worldview. This worldview is reflected in the ultimate care for humanity and the ecological environment, transcending individuals and small groups, intertwining humans with nature, society, and themselves. Holistic educators

are concerned not with the development of a single person, school, or country but rather link individuals, society, and the entire planet, and even the universe, from a broader perspective. While holistic education does not deny the significant changes and roles brought about by science and technology to human society, the scientification and instrumentalization do have brought significant troubles to humanity itself. University education lacking humanistic care and a correct view of the world, or lacking concern and contemplation for the surrounding things, is at best a form of education that “shapes tools” rather than truly “nurtures individuals”.

### 3. The Evolution of Holistic Education in Mainland China

The historical backdrop of education in China is both ancient and profound, tracing back to the era of the venerable educator Confucius (551 BCE - 479 BCE). Confucius put forth the philosophy of education that, to some extent, can be seen as an early form of holistic education. He advocated for an education that is guided by moral principles, rooted in virtue, based on benevolence, and enriched by the arts. This approach aimed to ensure that students could achieve a well-rounded development. The educational philosophy established by Confucius has exerted a significant influence on the development of Obara Kuniyoshi's holistic educational thought. Professor Zhou Zhiwen from Taiwan University pointed out that the “*She Xue*”, schools set up by local officials in villages during the Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644), and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, aimed at achieving the highest goal of holistic education. This reflects the essential understanding in traditional Chinese education that aside from pursuing practical benefits, there is also a pursuit of value, embodying the basic recognition of holistic education within the Chinese context (Yang, 2010). In the late Qing dynasty, the scholar Wang Guowei (1877-1927) articulated the notion in 1903 that a person is a synthesis of knowledge, emotion, and will, proposing a model of holistic education that simultaneously advances moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education (Yang, 2010). The renowned modern Chinese educator Qian Mu emphasized that the focal point of Chinese education has always been a form of holistic education, defining it as encompassing the entire inner life of an individual. Central to this holistic education is the cultivation of the heart, emotions, and moral character (Qian, 2018).

Throughout contemporary China, the path of holistic education has been marked by fluctuations and challenges. From the early days following the founding of the People's Republic of China in the 1950s through the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), the principal aim of education was to serve the needs of workers and peasants and to support economic construction, marrying education with productive labor. This era was heavily influenced by the Soviet model of education, where specialized education prevailed, and the principles of holistic education were sidelined, leading to a talent cultivation model focused on specialized skills. Since the mid-1980s, China has initiated adjustments and reforms in its educational sector. Over the following decades, a series of national policies on educational reform were introduced. The 1985 decision by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (hereinafter referred to as the Central Committee of CPC) on reforming the education system sought to “enhance the quality of the nation” (The Central Committee of CPC, 1985), setting a new direction for Chinese education, which is intended to change the educational landscape in mainland China at the time that was entrenched in an exam-oriented and specialized education model. Over the subsequent three decades, in line with China's rapid economic advancement, the nation introduced forward-looking policies to steer the reform and development of education. Key policies such as *the Resolution to Deepen the Reform of Education so as to Push Forward Quality-Oriented Education, the National Outline for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)*, *China's Education Modernization 2035*, and *the Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development and Vision 2035*, all emphasized the importance of quality education and the comprehensive development of talent. Specifically, quality education seeks to seamlessly integrate moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education throughout all facets of educational activities (The Central Committee of CPC & The State Council, 1999). The comprehensive development of talent encompasses not only cultural knowledge, ideological and moral cultivation, personality, physical and mental health, aesthetic taste, and humanistic literacy (The Central Committee of CPC & The State Council, 2010), but also the cultivation of willpower, cognitive abilities, innovative spirit (The Central Committee of CPC & The State Council, 2019), as well as patriotism, social responsibility awareness, and practical skills (The Central Committee of CPC, 2021). These policies reflect a shift from the previously dominant exam-oriented and specialized education towards a holistic education orientation since the late 1990s, embracing an educational philosophy that prioritizes the individual at its core, focuses on the all-round cultivation of individuals, emphasizes the fusion and cultivation of humanistic spirit and literacy, values the balanced development of professional knowledge and moral qualities, and nurtures the potential for individuals to become “whole persons” through interdisciplinary and cross-field knowledge integration and interaction (Wen & Si, 2018). In the last two decades, holistic education has been given due attention in mainland China, permeating educational activities across various levels, types, and subjects.

The initiation of scholarly research on holistic education within mainland China dates back to the 1990s. During this nascent phase, the quantity of research was notably sparse, with the focal point primarily resting on the introduction and

adaptation of Obara Kuniyoshi's philosophies and principles of holistic education (Zhou, 1991; Wang, 1995). Witnessing a gradual ascension from the closing years of the 20th century, the volume of research began to incrementally expand. A cadre of scholars embarked on a mission to systematically present and elucidate the core tenets of holistic education (Feng, 1999), its foundational advocacies (Liu, 2004; Hu & Zhang, 2021), envisioned ideal models (Peng & Mo, 2006), and the distinctive intellectual characteristics that define this educational approach (Xie & Zhang, 2007). Furthermore, there emerged a trend among scholars to apply the precepts of holistic education across various tiers and types of educational reforms within mainland China. This involved identifying holistic education as the quintessential foundation and principal method for the enhancement of quality education within universities (Wen, 2002). The philosophy of holistic education was adopted as a guiding framework for fostering the healthy growth and self-development of students in higher vocational colleges (Zhang, 2011). Advocacy was made for high school education to transition from a singular, utilitarian pursuit of academic advancement and employment towards a more comprehensive, long-term value pursuit rooted in the principles of holistic education (Song, 2011). It was proposed that the educational goals of specialized foreign language education should strive to "educate the subject, nurture the whole person" (Wen, 2014), aiming for an educational paradigm "based on comprehensive integration, established in specialization, and returning to individuality", thereby cultivating students who are not only proficient in their professional knowledge and basic skills but also exhibit a well-rounded and complete character (Wen, 2016). By delving into the positive contributions of university linguistics knowledge towards the development of a spectrum of intelligences—linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalistic—the research elucidates how linguistic disciplines and specializations can fulfill the educational objectives of fostering holistic development (Zhang & Gao, 2023). Efforts to reform the talent cultivation system have been directed through three pivotal dimensions: value shaping, knowledge formation, and practical innovation (Zhang, 2022, 2023). These scholarly endeavors have significantly contributed to the dissemination and evolution of holistic education concepts across mainland China, thereby stimulating a wave of educational reforms. Nonetheless, despite these advancements, the commencement and proliferation of holistic education research in mainland China have been relatively delayed and less voluminous compared to international counterparts. Although a plurality of studies have aligned with the overarching trends of national educational development, research specifically centered on the practical application of curriculum remains markedly insufficient. This document endeavors to further explore and delineate the practical implementations of holistic education within the realm of college English curriculum in the sections that follow.

#### **4. Development and Challenges of College English Curriculum in Mainland China's Universities**

College English courses, which are compulsory for non-English majors in mainland China's higher education institutions, constitute a core component of general education. Previously known as "Public English" until 1985, these courses have traditionally aimed to develop a range of language skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating, with a distinct emphasis on their practical and utilitarian value. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, nationwide disruptions in economic, educational, and social development led to the suspension of English courses. Following the implementation of reform and opening-up policy in 1978, China began to restore and rebuild its international relationships, gradually re-establishing its presence on the global stage. As a universal language, English has increasingly received attention from the Chinese government, society, educational institutions, parents, students, and professionals. In the 1980s, the primary goal of college English courses was to support production and the "Four Modernizations" (namely, modernization of industry, agriculture, national defense, science and technology), using English as a tool to access information needed for various professions (The Revision Group of College English Syllabus, 1985; The Revision Group of College English Syllabus, 1986); and therefore, the college English courses in the 1980s placed special emphasis on cultivating students' reading skills. After China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2000, the demand for English-proficient individuals surged, making English proficiency a crucial skill for academic advancement, professional development, and facilitating China's internationalization. Consequently, English education was accorded unprecedented significance, and the curriculum during this period emphasized fostering students' comprehensive English application skills, particularly in listening and speaking, to support their further education, career development, and social interactions (Department of Higher Education Affiliated to Ministry of Education, 2007). Over the last nearly forty years, as English education in mainland China's universities has rapidly evolved, it has also faced criticism from both society and academia. These critiques have highlighted significant issues in curriculum design, instructional approaches, curriculum resources, and the quality of teaching staff.

Firstly, college English curriculum in China often suffer from a lack of diversity in content and form, primarily focusing on language skills training and lacking courses that can broaden students' knowledge and academic perspectives. The curriculum lacks a comprehensive general education, with the tradition of humanities education being diminished. The courses offered are overly influenced by market orientations, excessively professionalized, and place too much

emphasis on short-term educational gains. Students are unable to broaden their horizons through their English studies to achieve a holistic understanding of virtue and knowledge, as well as specialized expertise.

Secondly, the educational philosophy and teaching approaches are relatively outdated. Many English instructors at universities in mainland China still employ didactic “chalk and talk” and “spoon-feeding” methods, with the teacher dominating the classroom and neglecting the individualized learning needs of students. Additionally, the teaching methods employed by instructors are quite uniform, lacking interactive, heuristic, and inquiry-based approaches that would effectively engage students’ initiative and stimulate their creativity. Consequently, students’ capacities for innovation, logical reasoning, and problem-solving skills remain underdeveloped through their participation in college English courses.

Thirdly, although there have been improvements in the past two decades to university English textbooks in mainland China, moving away from the 1980s and 1990s principles of focusing on text-centric and grammar-driven materials towards integrating structuralism, functionalism, and task-based teaching principles, the content and knowledge structure of college English textbooks remain highly uniform. This is primarily evident in the abundance of print and digital teaching resources related to English language knowledge and skills, while interdisciplinary and cross-specialty textbooks and course resources are notably scarce.

Lastly, the faculty background for university English courses in mainland China’s higher education institutions is quite homogenous, with the vast majority having specialized in foreign language and literature during their university studies. This lack of interdisciplinary and cross-specialty knowledge makes it difficult to inspire students to engage in interdisciplinary integrated learning during English courses. Additionally, many English instructors in mainland China’s universities have not effectively balanced teaching, research, and community service, resulting in areas where improvements are needed in teaching practices, research innovation, and commitment to service.

## **5. A Study on the Practice Models of Holistic Education in College English Curriculum**

### *5.1 Research Framework*

The journey of educational reform in mainland China customarily commences with the establishment of overarching policies by the nation’s authoritative bodies, predominantly the Central Committee of CPC, the Ministry of Education (hereinafter referred to as MOE) or the State Council. These macro-level policies serve as a compass, guiding subordinate entities, such as the departments overseeing basic and higher education, to formulate or revise curricula and teaching outlines across various disciplines and educational tiers. This structured approach ensures that educational reforms are propelled forward in a hierarchical, top-down manner. This paper specifically delves into the domain of college English courses. Since their introduction, the national educational authorities have issued five distinct editions of the teaching syllabus for college English courses. Educational institutions across the nation have adapted their teaching methodologies and curriculum reforms in response to the directives and stipulations set forth in each version of the syllabus. The initial four syllabi, unveiled in the years 1985, 1986, 1999, and 2007 respectively, uniformly underscored the instrumental facets of the English courses, mirroring the essence of specialized education tailored to specific professional skills. However, a significant paradigm shift is observed in the most recent edition of the syllabus, the “*College English Curriculum Guidelines (2020)*” (hereinafter referred to as *the 2020 Guidelines*), unveiled by the National Foreign Languages Teaching Advisory Board under the Ministry of Education in response to the issues present in the curriculum design, teaching methods, course resources, and faculty strength of college English courses in mainland China’s higher education institutions. This edition notably broadens the courses’ scope to encompass both instrumental and humanistic dimensions. The instrumental dimension is aimed at bolstering students’ holistic language competencies, covering listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating. Concurrently, the humanistic dimension places a premium on adopting a people-centric educational stance, advocating for the elevation of human values, and placing a strong emphasis on nurturing students’ comprehensive qualities and facilitating their all-encompassing development (MOE, 2020). *The 2020 Guidelines*’ nuanced approach distinctly echoes the ethos and aspirations of holistic education, marking a deliberate shift towards educating well-rounded individuals. This exploration will further dissect the implementation strategies of holistic education within college English courses, rigorously aligning with the detailed specifications articulated in *the 2020 Guidelines*.

### *5.2 Practical Pathways*

English language education carried out in the institutions of higher learning embodies the education of the “whole person” and is capable of achieving a synthesis between the conceptual level of holistic education and its operational level in practice. The college English curriculum can be integrated as a methodological approach to holistic education. It can become an effective means of realizing the ideal educational blueprint of holistic education through four aspects: curriculum system, instructional approaches, teaching resources, and faculty strength.

### 5.2.1 Creating a Curriculum System Grounded in Holistic Education Principles

In response to the issue of college English curriculum in mainland China being overly focused on language knowledge and skills, *the 2020 Guidelines* has restructured the curriculum system, which is divided into three distinct categories, reflecting a comprehensive approach to language education. Firstly, the general English courses focus extensively on imparting foundational English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation, and interpretation (MOE, 2020). These courses have been a staple offering within the university English program, aiming to equip students with the essential language tools needed for effective communication. Secondly, the curriculum includes English for specific purposes (hereinafter referred to as ESP) courses, which are further subdivided into academic English and professional English tracks. These courses are meticulously designed to prepare students for the specific linguistic demands they will encounter in academic discourse and professional settings, respectively (MOE, 2020). The ESP courses underscore the importance of establishing “relationships” between various fields of knowledge, fostering an extensive network of connections across distinct disciplines. This educational strategy encourages an interdisciplinary and cross-domain curriculum arrangement and teaching design, showcasing the interweaving, permeation, integration, and mutual enhancement of disciplines. Rather than segregating knowledge into isolated compartments, this approach promotes a holistic integration of disciplines, covering areas such as science, engineering, economics, law, philosophy, education, literature, medicine, management, and the arts. By closely integrating the study of English language skills with specialized knowledge from these diverse fields, the aim is to connect English language education with broader societal, global, and even universal contexts, thereby advancing the overarching objectives of holistic education. Thirdly, intercultural communication courses are crafted to blend English language proficiency with cultural literacy, embedding a core theme throughout the curriculum: the development and critical examination of values and the nurturing of critical thinking skills (MOE, 2020). These courses are designed to cultivate students’ global perspectives and universal outlooks, transforming them into “whole persons” who possess a rich humanistic background in history, literature, philosophy, and the arts.

The overarching goal of establishing a curriculum system inspired by holistic education is not merely to produce talents through specialized, technical, or instrumental training. Instead, it emphasizes the lifelong development of students, advocating for a form of education that is comprehensive, harmonious, and complete. This developmental approach seeks not only the all-around growth of students’ individual qualities but also their synchronized development in concert with society, humanity, and the environment.

### 5.2.2 Implementing Instructional Approaches Based on the Concept of Holistic Education

In the 1980s, the mainstream instructional approach for public English courses (later changed its name into college English courses) was the Grammar-Translation Method. By the 1990s, the teaching approach for college English courses had shifted to a combination of the Grammar-Translation and the Audio-lingual Method. At the beginning of the 21st century, the issue of “mute English” among the Chinese students became increasingly prominent, leading to a growing scrutiny and critique of traditional English teaching methods by both the academic community and society at large. It was during this period that Chinese domestic universities began to experiment with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach to enhance students’ practical English application abilities. These representative teaching methods encountered two primary issues: firstly, they were all introduced from abroad, drawing upon foreign language teaching philosophies and perspectives that might not fully align with China’s national conditions, school environments, and students’ learning situations. Secondly, these methods primarily focused on the cultivation of students’ linguistic knowledge or linguistic abilities, with an emphasis on language teaching that serves specialized education rather than holistic education.

In order to overcome the drawbacks of “chalk and talk” and “spoon-feeding” teaching methods and to better stimulate students’ initiative in learning, the “Production-Oriented Approach” (hereinafter referred to as POA), an indigenous Chinese pedagogy was proposed. POA has emerged as the most influential and widely applied English teaching methodology within Chinese higher education institutions to date. One of the core pedagogical principles of POA is holistic education, grounded in the belief that language education targets humans, who are highly sophisticated beings with emotions and thoughts. Teachers are urged not to perceive learners as mere products on an assembly line or robots to be manipulated at will. To truly serve the comprehensive development of individuals, education must consider all facets of the human condition, including intellectual, emotional, and moral aspects (Wen, 2015).

*The 2020 Guidelines* advocates for a variety of instructional approaches, such as task-based, cooperative, project-based, and inquiry-based teaching (MOE, 2020), further addressing and rectifying the traditional overemphasis on the instrumental nature of English language courses while neglecting their humanistic elements. It mandates that college English courses should not solely cater to utilitarian goals like further education or employment but should also encompass the cultivation of students’ cross-cultural communication skills, autonomous learning capabilities,

comprehensive cultural literacy, humanistic spirit, and critical thinking abilities (MOE, 2020). Whether it is the POA teaching methodology or the diverse methods mentioned in *the 2020 Guidelines*, all are means and pathways towards achieving the objectives of holistic education.

### 5.2.3 Developing Comprehensive Curriculum Resources Anchored in the Principles of Holistic Education

The establishment of a curriculum system that truly embodies the principles of holistic education necessitates the integration of appropriately designed curriculum resources to support and enhance this educational approach. This integration involves the meticulous development of teaching materials tailored specifically for general English courses, ESP courses, including both academic English and professional English, as well as intercultural communication courses. These resources are pivotal in fortifying the linkage between collegiate English education and broader societal, human, and environmental contexts. To address the issues of uniformity in teaching content and textbook knowledge structure, as well as the scarcity of interdisciplinary and cross-specialty teaching resources in university English courses, *the 2020 Guidelines* stipulates that the textbooks deployed within college English courses should encapsulate and reflect the rich tapestry of human knowledge accumulation and the fruits of innovative achievements. They are encouraged to be deeply rooted in the Chinese context while simultaneously adopting a global outlook, thereby broadening educational horizons, mirroring the latest advancements in global science and technology, and assimilating the exemplary achievements of human civilization (MOE, 2020). Importantly, the scope of these educational materials must transcend the confines of mere specialization, technicality, and instrumentality, infusing a rich array of humanistic and scientific elements including, but not limited to, history, literature, philosophy, arts, and sciences. Should these materials focus solely on imparting knowledge and skills pertinent to specific domains, purely with the aim of facilitating students' job procurement, yet overlook the imperative of nurturing a profound care for life, a quest for the meaning of existence, contemplation on the wholeness of human nature, and an expansion of one's life perspectives, they risk producing graduates who resemble "technically adept robots" or "economic beings" rather than "whole persons" characterized by a balanced and comprehensive development across physiological, psychological, intellectual, non-intellectual, emotional, and imaginative dimensions.

Furthermore, the construction of curriculum resources inspired by holistic education also necessitates a thorough revision of the teaching syllabus. It is crucial to understand that holistic education cannot be simplistically defined as merely acquainting arts students with some natural science knowledge or exposing science students to a smattering of humanities and social sciences. Nor can it be reduced to the mere addition of elective courses. Rather, it requires the establishment of systematic, scientifically grounded, and logically structured teaching objectives, requirements, content, arrangements, and evaluation that resonate with a deep understanding of the fundamental nature and intricacies of holistic education.

In addition to traditional teaching materials, the development of online teaching resources that complement the textbooks is equally important. By leveraging digital resources to foster smart education, this approach empowers the holistic cultivation of talents. Online educational resources serve to facilitate personalized and autonomous learning among students, enabling the principles of holistic education to extend beyond the confines of the classroom and the school environment. This approach aims to achieve a comprehensive, omnipresent, and continuous educational experience that nurtures individuals holistically.

### 5.2.4 Enhancing Teacher Competencies Within the Framework of Holistic Education

The adage from *the 2020 Guidelines*, "The grand scheme of education is fundamentally reliant on its teachers" (MOE, 2020), encapsulates the belief that the fortification of teacher abilities and standards is pivotal for the assurance of educational quality. In 2020, the Central Committee of CPC and the State Council released the "*The Overall Plan for Deepening Educational Evaluation Reform in the New Era*," which advocates for a shift away from the utilitarian educational orientation that prioritizes only scores, college admissions, and diplomas. It also calls for the correction of the phenomenon where teachers place more emphasis on imparting knowledge than on holistic student development (The Central Committee of CPC & The State Council, 2020). The evolving educational landscape of the new era, alongside the specific developmental requisites of university English teaching, has laid down new sets of expectations for educators, thereby presenting significant challenges. In response to the issues of a homogenous knowledge background among faculty of university English courses and their insufficient teaching and research capabilities, *the 2020 Guidelines* specifies that instructors of university English are now envisaged to possess a broad spectrum of competencies including, but not limited to, pedagogical literacy, disciplinary expertise, instructional proficiency, research acumen, and information literacy (MOE, 2020). More specifically, educators are expected to possess a knowledge structure that is both deep in specialization and broad in interdisciplinary understanding. They should demonstrate robust professional knowledge while also engaging with a wide array of interdisciplinary insights, equipped with the skills to employ diverse knowledge bases in problem-solving scenarios. Moreover, teachers are

expected to display considerable research capabilities and a high degree of instructional effectiveness, adeptly leveraging information technology to bolster their teaching methodologies.

Within the holistic education paradigm, the role of teachers undergoes a transformative shift. They transcend the traditional role of mere knowledge transmitters to become facilitators, organizers, enablers, and collaborators in the learning journey. Given this context, university English instructors are urged to proactively meet these evolving demands and challenges. They are encouraged to expand their intellectual horizons by engaging with interdisciplinary and cross-specialty knowledge, thereby enriching the English teaching process with content that spans various academic disciplines. This entails the crafting of tailored teaching objectives and lesson plans that reflect individual teacher characteristics, fostering an environment of continuous professional development and refinement in teaching practice. Participation in professional seminars and interdisciplinary academic conferences is encouraged to enhance research capabilities and deepen scholarly engagement. It is through the comprehensive development of educators themselves that the ambitious goals of holistic education, particularly within the context of university English teaching, can be fully realized. By fostering educators who are not only well-versed in their respective fields but also embody the holistic development they seek to instill in their students, the vision of cultivating well-rounded individuals can be achieved.

### 5.3 Discussion

Since the inception of the 1980s, English language education in mainland China has been on a path of sustained growth and evolution. The focus during the 1980s was predominantly on nurturing students' linguistic abilities to contribute to the nation's economic progress and the ambitious goals of the "Four Modernizations". This era, however, also witnessed the emergence of drawbacks associated with an exam-oriented educational system. During this time, the primary objective for the majority of university students learning English was to excel in examinations, securing language proficiency certificates to facilitate job placements. This led to an acute emphasis on scores, academic advancement, and the accumulation of diplomas, rendering English language education exceedingly instrumental and utilitarian in nature. By the tail end of the 1990s, there was a gradual shift in English language education towards valuing humanistic literacy. It became increasingly recognized that language education extended beyond the mere transmission of linguistic knowledge and skills; it was also about deepening students' understanding of and connection to society and the broader world. This shift laid the groundwork for the future embrace of holistic education principles. Over the last decade, the call for fostering students' comprehensive qualities has grown louder. In the wake of educational reforms, and with the introduction of *the 2020 Guidelines*, university English education has robustly championed the cause of holistic education. This educational approach stresses the importance of integrating English language learning with insights from other academic disciplines, employing student-centered teaching methodologies, and prioritizing teaching resources that marry professional content with cultural and humanistic enrichment. Furthermore, it underscores the necessity for educators to evolve into multifaceted talents, endowed with extensive knowledge and exceptional capabilities in both teaching and research. Presently, college English courses transcend their traditional roles as mere instruments for academic progression and employment. They are imbued with enduring and, potentially, lifelong significance, profoundly influencing various facets of students' development. This includes the holistic growth of students' personalities, the molding of their value systems, the nurturing of societal ethics, and the cultivation of a sense of public duty.

### 6. Conclusion

The essence of education is inherently human-focused, with the moral and ethical development of individuals standing as the perennial and paramount issue within the educational sphere. Despite variations in their specific expositions on educational matters, the unified stance of the three eminent Greek educators — Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle — was clear: the sole and supreme purpose of education lies in the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of wisdom for its own sake. They firmly believed that education should not be tethered to any other utilitarian objectives and strongly opposed the notion of education being merely a means to serve ancillary utilitarian ends, distinct and detached from any form of vocational training. Holistic education emerges as a response to the demands of modern societal evolution, evolving as a counterpoint to the confines of specialized education. It represents an integration of educational philosophy and the practical implementation of curricular models, and it stands as a formidable challenge that universities in mainland China are confronted with in the 21st century. The educational philosophies across cultures, from Plato to Confucius, unanimously stress the mission of education to nurture individuals who are broad-minded, morally upright, responsible, and capable of independent thought. In our current era, characterized by a dominance of scientism, empiricism, and pragmatism, confronting the challenge of fulfilling the educational responsibility to foster students' rational development and the enrichment of their character becomes a critical task. This challenge is particularly poignant in a society that overly prioritizes practical skills and knowledge while pursuing utilitarian values to an excessive degree. How to undertake this responsibility of nurturing well-rounded human development and character perfection amidst such a societal backdrop is an unshrinkable duty for all educators. This responsibility also



delineates the direction for educational reforms that have been continuously explored by universities both within and beyond China's borders, seeking to adapt and innovate in the realm of educational practices and philosophies.

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### **Authors contributions**

Yilin Cao initiated the topic and devised the study design. Beifei Shen contributed to the introduction and the second section, delving into the origin and essence of holistic education. Shangrong Li authored the third section, exploring the evolution of holistic education in mainland China. Yilin Cao authored the fourth, fifth and the conclusion sections and led the overall revision process.

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