

# *On the Application of Seminar in International Students' Teaching Practice*

—An Example from University of Electronic Science and Technology of China

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**Abstract**—At present, China has become the third largest study abroad destination around the world, the number of international students in China has increased year by year. Chinese traditional large-scale class teaching model and cramming teaching method have been unable to achieve the goal of cultivating internationalized professional talents. What is the most important in improving the teaching quality of international students is to innovate the teaching model and method. Based on the teaching situation of international students in University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (UESTC), this paper analyzes the necessities and feasibilities of the application of Seminar in international students teaching practice, and puts forward the recommendation to optimize the application of Seminar.

**Keywords**—Seminar; necessities; feasibilities; recommendation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Seminar originated in Germany in the 19th century, which refers to that under the guidance of teachers, the students were divided into thematic research groups, which focused on discussing a variety of academic views, tracking the latest developments in the subject area and exploring the new research areas.<sup>[1]</sup> As an important teaching model, Seminar has been widely used in western countries, and has a great influence on the development of modern universities.

Since the Chinese Ministry of Education launched the "Study in China Program" in 2010, the scale of international students is constantly expanding. The particularity of international students determines that the teaching model of international students must be different from the traditional teaching model of China, which requires teaching innovation in accordance of international students' aptitude. In China, the teaching of international students is still at the stage of "differentiating", such as unofficial management, separate classes, and lower standards.<sup>[2]</sup> Although this teaching model is conducive to the students management, it is unable to achieve the effective interaction between teachers and students. Therefore, based on the teaching situation of international students in UESTC, this paper will analyze the necessities and feasibilities of the application of Seminar in international students teaching practice, and put forward the recommendation to optimize its application, in order to obtain the real value of international students education.

## II. THE TEACHING SITUATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN UESTC

In order to improve the quality of personnel training and cultivate more elite talents, UESTC has attached great importance to research-based teaching methods and curriculum construction. Since 2014, UESTC has initiated Seminar into 91 courses, including 38 Freshman Seminars and 53 Inquiry Teaching Courses, which covering more than 6,900 students. However, UESTC offers 57 courses to 501 international students, but only 9 courses adopted with Seminar, which covering 186 international students. It can be seen that the teaching model of international students in UESTC is greatly influenced by the traditional teaching methods. Most of the classroom teaching models are based on large-scale class teaching model, which lacks effective use of new and modern teaching methods. There are mainly three problems as follows.

### A. *Obsolete and unitary teaching methods.*

At the mercy of course form, course location, students number and other factors, it's difficult to implement discussion, heuristic and inquiry-based interaction between teachers and students.<sup>[3]</sup> In UESTC, many teachers have formed a fixed thinking mode; they are habituated to apply the traditional teaching model to international students teaching. Their all action aim at making international students accepts their knowledge and thinking pattern. However, this traditional cramming teaching method is not carefully designed in regard to the particularity of international students so that it can't bring the initiative of the international students into study. The knowledge systems for international students on the basis of obsolete and unitary teaching methods are largely unable to meet the needs of the development of international community and education.<sup>[4]</sup>

### B. *Laggard teaching materials compilation.*

The selection of teaching materials is the first step to ensure the teaching quality for international students. At present, there are two categories of textbooks for international students in UESTC: The first is the original foreign textbooks. Its content is detailed, comprehensive and specific and is superior in terms of disciplinary construction; but these kinds of teaching material are very expensive as well as not conform to the

teaching requirement of China. The teacher only selects part of the content to explain, leading to difficulties in students after-school review. The second is domestic teaching materials. Its contents are based on the teaching requirements of China, which organizing experts to write English version or bilingual version of the textbook; but this kind of teaching materials is theoretical and easily affected by the professional standards of teachers and scientificity and innovation can't be guaranteed. These two types of teaching materials play a certain role in the international students teaching, but they can't meet the needs of in-depth study. To a certain extent, they will affect the quality of international students teaching practice.

### *C. Defective assessment mechanism.*

There are two types of courses for international students in UESTC - examination courses and research courses. Examination course requires students to pass the exam at the end of the course, while research class generally doesn't have an exam. No matter what kind of assessment methods, the content of the assessment is overweight in academic and not conducive to the comprehensive development of students. In the present assessment system of the UESTC, the implementation of assessment is not strict and scientific enough, and the real situation can't be reflected objectively and comprehensively. The setting up of assessment is random, and short of the guides of unify requirements. What's more, some examinations adopt the open-book form, and the test is simple. And the teachers generally try to allow every international student to pass the exam because of their particularity. For a long time, the meaning of the examination has been diluted.

The above-mentioned defects in the teaching of international students in UESTC requires us to improve teaching methods, explore new teaching models and systems, and teach students how to learn, rather than simply imparting knowledge. It's difficult for traditional teaching model to adapt the needs of contemporary education. To establish a more personalized teaching model - Seminar is an important orientation of teaching reform.

## III. THE NECESSITIES OF THE APPLICATION OF SEMINAR IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TEACHING PRACTICE

Compared with the developed countries, the application of Seminar in China is relatively late and slow. In 1990s, Seminar began to be used in Beijing, Shanghai and other developed areas, now has not yet achieved regional popularity. Although there is still a lot to be improved in Seminar, the traditional teaching mode has become more and more malpractice, which is not in accord with the social education requirement. Therefore, Seminar is the inevitable trend of the current education.

### *A. Seminar is the objective requirement to adapt the globalization of education*

Because of the rapid popularization of the network and information, it's necessary to give full scope to students initiative to improve the teaching quality of international students.<sup>[5]</sup> From the perspective of teaching innovation, it's important to explore modern teaching methods which are suitable for modern teaching ideas and can meet the unique

requirements of university education on the basis of traditional teaching methods. Seminar is a typical teaching model to break the indoctrination of traditional teaching practice and to stimulate the students' initiative. Seminar aims at fully excavating the academic potentials of all the participants in the course, and to maximize their mutual understanding and interaction at different levels.<sup>[6]</sup> With the advent of knowledge economic era, the rate of knowledge renewal is accelerating and the theories of various disciplines are changing rapidly. Faced with the trend of knowledge-based economy and information globalization, it is only by continuous learning can understand its development trend, and adapt to its changes.

### *B. Seminar is an effective way to meet the diverse needs of international students*

Due to the differences of language, educational background and culture of international students, large-scale class teaching model and cramming teaching method can't meet their diverse needs. According to the multi-requirement of international students, teachers can teach students in accordance with their aptitude, change the teaching methods and content, which will increase the interaction and discussion to enhance students' sense of participation in the course. In addition, Seminar not only allows students to understand the culture of different countries and overcome the fear caused by heterogeneous culture, but also to enhance cross-cultural communication and coordination, mobilize the enthusiasm of learning, broaden the international perspective, and achieve significant teaching results in the process of team cooperation.

### *C. Seminar is an important method to cultivate the comprehensive quality of international students*

There are five steps of application of Seminar: the topic introduction by teachers, data analysis and collation by groups, group presentations, debate and communication, summary and commentary. This kind of teaching model between the open and interactive environment is to make up for the traditional shortcomings such as obsolete and unitary teaching methods, and laggard teaching materials compilation. On the one hand, the teachers can keep abreast of the progress of the study and research work of foreign students, and adjust the teaching content of in a planned and objective way. On the other hand, it will help foreign students to broaden their academic horizons, develop academic atmosphere, understand the dynamic development of the subject and related disciplines, and stimulate the interest of scientific research and create a good exchange environment for international exchange. This kind of academic discussion and the exchange of ideas will eventually lead to truly original research.

## IV. THE FEASIBILITIES OF THE APPLICATION OF SEMINAR IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TEACHING PRACTICE

It can be seen from the American scholars' discussion on relationship between grades and class scale that the students achievement are increased when the class scale is decreased to below 30 students. In other words, with the reduction of ratio of teachers and students, interpersonal interaction between teachers and students has been increased, and also self-learning ability of students has been strengthened.<sup>[7]</sup> This part takes

UESTC as an example to analyze the feasibilities of applying Seminar to the international students teaching practice.

**A. High satisfaction from students**

In order to verify the feasibilities of applying Seminar in international students teaching practice, this paper surveys students satisfaction on Seminar from 8 perspectives - independent learning ability, creative ability of academy, learning interests, teacher-student interaction, presentation skill, problem-finding skills, critical thinking and students interaction. A total of 350 questionnaires were issued and 289 questionnaires were returned, including 114 questionnaires for international students, as demonstrated below.

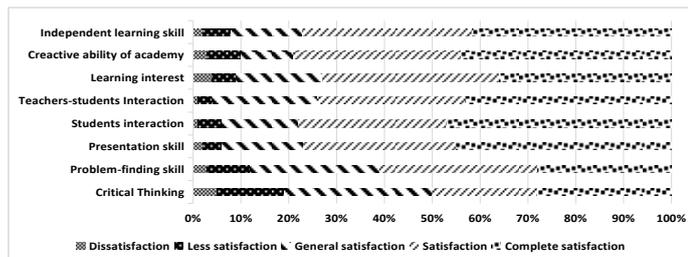


Fig. 1. Survey of Students' Satisfaction on Seminar

The Fig. 1 shows that the students' satisfaction with the ability of critical thinking and problem-finding skills in Seminar has reached more than 80%; the satisfaction with independent learning ability, creative ability of academy, teaching interests, teacher-student interaction, presentation skill and students interaction has reached more than 90%. Thus, Seminar has a great feasibility to be applied in international students teaching practice because of the high satisfaction from students.

**B. Policy support**

On July 29, 2010, China officially issued the National Medium-and Long-Term Plan for Education Reform and Development(2010-2020), which proposed to deepen the reform of curriculum and teaching system, to promote the new teaching model-Seminar, to improve the quality of higher education and to build a powerful country in higher education. Such as Beijing University, Tsinghua university places have been trying to implement Seminar in order to continuously upgrade the level of general education and curriculum quality. For the practice of national education policy, UESTC has put forward the Implementation Suggestions of Seminar in the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China after research and demonstration, which indicates that Seminar is an important carrier to promote teaching reform and improve teaching quality. Universities must find a way to disrupt the monolithic classroom and move toward a student-centric model.

**C. Willingness of participants**

The international students of UESTCU mainly from Ghana, India, Pakistan, Nepal and other countries. Compared with the domestic students, international students are a lively group because of the different aspects such as society, culture and education background. They are independent, self-confident,

and willing to interact with teachers in courses. Seminar emphasizes mutual interaction among students through the discussion and exchange of questions to cultivate the students' communication skills, listening skills and cooperation ability. In addition, practice of Seminar pays more attention to cooperative learning and self-learning, which conducive to the teaching practice for the international students from different countries and different backgrounds. Seminar is one of the most effective ways to adapt to the new era of knowledge and to cultivate the students' ability of acquiring knowledge.

**D. The improvement of infrastructure**

The renewal project of classroom for Seminar was started in September 2015. Interior of a classroom with active desks and chairs, layout types including circular, U-shaped, fan-shaped, array, square and so on. With interactive electronic whiteboard, multimedia can be realized by computer, tablet or smart phone to achieve the interaction between students and teachers. Enterprise staff communicates with instructors on the use of multimedia devices, introducing the different characteristics and application of all kinds of classroom devices. Improve the infrastructure is an important safeguard in applying Seminar in international teaching practice.

**E. Ripe experience from top universities**

Seminar was originated from the Berlin University of Germany at the beginning of 19th century. It combined teaching with scientific research, which was limited to the education of postgraduates in small class. In the end of 19th century, Seminar has been used as a teaching and research model to develop standardized scholars with innovative research ability, which laid the foundation for Germany to establish a batch of research universities, attach equal importance to teaching and research, and modern doctoral education. At the beginning of 20th Century, Seminar was adopted in several famous universities of United States, especially in postgraduates, contributing to the fundamental changes of the education system.<sup>[8]</sup> Thanks to the innovativeness and criticalness of Seminar, it was quickly accepted by college teachers and students in America. In the 1960s, with the popularization of higher education era and the expansion of university scale for several years, Seminar become far more common.

**V. RECOMMENDATION ON OPTIMIZING THE APPLICATION OF SEMINAR**

Seminar is an advanced and effective teaching model. However, because of lack of experience, there is huge space to improve the application and to ensure the quality of international students teaching practice.

**A. Integrating educational resources and strengthening the faculty**

It is not natural for teachers to change international students' behavior and ideas by shrinking the scale of class; it is necessary to complete the transformation through effective special training and some supports.<sup>[9]</sup> Seminar draws higher demand in the academic levels of teachers, who must master the basic skill of teaching and be aware of curriculum system and the leading theories and current development of the subject. Therefore, universities can establish the special fund for

teachers, which can provide the basic conditions for teachers to participate in the international academic activities, replenishment of new information, and grasp the trends and priority areas of the subject. In addition, experienced professors can cooperate with the young teachers in the process of Seminar, which can make up the difference between groups of teachers resources. On the basis of complementary advantages to promote teaching cooperation, enhance the teaching experience of young teachers and promote the progress of young teachers in teaching practice.

*B. Emphasizing diversity of students and optimizing grouping strategy*

Establishment of group cooperation model is an indispensable link in a teaching activity. The group should be based on the teaching content and the level of knowledge of international students, and teachers should clear the role of every group member to guarantee the opportunity to self-expression. Used multi-layer method in the group can maintain differences within the group members and similarities among groups. The grouping method allows every student to find a competitor in other groups so as to promote the development of international students in a competitive manner and improve the overall level of the group. To complete some difficult tasks from different types of group cooperation, the group spirit of cooperation and the awareness of the competition will be strengthened.

*C. Changing the evaluation system and focusing on learning process*

The final grades are regarded as the sole criterion for performance evaluation in the traditional large-scale teaching model. Seminar requires changing the evaluation system, advocating a variety of evaluation methods and shifting the summative evaluation to process evaluation. Played down the international students' final grades and taken the attitude, group cooperation, engagement, and presentation as the evaluation indexes. This evaluation model not only tests the expression and collaboration capabilities of international students, but also forms a comprehensive and diversified evaluation mode, promoting the overall development of international students.

## VI. CONCLUSION

With the globalization and internationalization of higher education demanding to improve the overall level of the educational opening-up, strengthen international exchange and cooperation, and borrow insights from higher education around the world. The development of international students education is a symbol of the degree of openness and internationalization of a university. Seminar conforms to the characteristics of international students in China. Application of Seminar in international students teaching practice is conducive to improving the internationalization of Chinese universities, reducing the gap between developing and developed countries, enhancing the comprehensive competitiveness. All of them contribute to create the top universities. Seminar has been integrated into the practice of higher education in the world, becoming one of the important teaching models in first - class universities.

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