

Chinese Higher Education Pedagogies in Social Sciences and Humanities: A Systematic Literature and Policy Review

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Research Domains

International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Abstract

This research locates and identifies what are the ‘new’ and emerging pedagogies in the social sciences and humanities that have been implemented in Chinese higher education (HE) since China’s Deepening Curriculum Reform (CDCR). The research conducted a systematic literature review of the academic and policy literature. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol was adopted; 155 works were included in a final review. NVivo was used to code and organise the findings. We identified seven pedagogies: (1) flipped classroom, (2) English Medium Instruction (EMI), (3) Massive Online Open Course (MOOC), (4) case study, (5) experimental pedagogy, (6) problem-posing and (7) task-driven pedagogy. Our analysis analysed the ‘Chinese characteristics’ embedded in the pedagogies, namely the element of ideological and political education. Our study will also serve as a basis for further research examining how China’s new pedagogies shape classroom practices internationally.

Full paper

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The current literature suggests that ‘teacher-centred’ pedagogy is

the dominant pedagogy in Chinese HE, and the impacts of this phenomenon are listed regarding the domestic and international environment, including as the cohort of Chinese international students is growing significantly, this can influence the teaching and learning outcome of the foreign universities they go to as well (Jian, Qi and Xin, 2011; Xie, 2010; Yin, Han and Lu, 2017). However, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in China has implemented a series of approaches to alter this situation, introducing China's Deepening Curriculum Reform (CDCR) to promote various pedagogies (MOE, 2014). Moreover, there is a large body of literature on pedagogies, mostly in the areas of STEM subjects and English language teaching, to reflect the internationalisation of Chinese education. It is worth noting that there is less research on pedagogies in the humanities and social sciences in China, which also account for a high proportion of Chinese students studying abroad, and that there is a large literature on pedagogies and student experience in the UK HE (Cross and Hitchcock, 2008; Crawford and Wang, 2015; Gu and Maley, 2008; van Noort, 2021). Therefore, the aim of this research is to locate and identify what are the 'new' and emerging pedagogies that are implemented in Chinese higher education (HE) since the CDCR, with particular attention to the area of social science and humanities.

The research will examine the influences over these pedagogies of domestic and foreign policies and cultural aspects. More importantly, because Chinese students continue to be the largest group of international students studying abroad, using UK HE as a case study, it will serve as a basis for studies that examine how China's new pedagogies shape classroom practices, student-teacher interactions, and other aspects of higher education internationally.

Hence, this research conducts a systematic literature review of the academic and policy literature to answer the following questions:

1. What are the emerging pedagogic approaches used in Chinese HE, particularly the social sciences and humanities;
2. Are there any particular pedagogies in Chinese HE for social science and humanities that have Chinese characteristics? If so, what are the pedagogies and what Chinese characteristics are contained?; and

3. In what way, the ideological and political factors that can have influence regarding the adoption of the identified pedagogies?

This will serve as the basis for further research to understand the influence of these pedagogies beyond China.

Methodology

This research adopts desk-based methods, which mainly involve published research papers and policy analysis. The aim of desk-based research is to develop new understanding or theories about existing literature or documents, which is to fill the research gaps and aims. To be more specific, there is a particular lack of systematic reviews on the pedagogies in the humanities and social sciences in Chinese higher education. In contrast, a relative lack of summaries of pedagogical approaches in both English and Chinese draws our attention. To elaborate, PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is adopted to conduct this systematic literature review (Moher et al., 2009), and we screened 155 pieces of literature out of 44,449. During the review, NVivo was used to code and organise the literature. There are seven pedagogies identified as our initial findings: (1) flipped classroom, (2) English Medium Instruction (EMI), (3) Massive Online Open Course (MOOC), (4) case study, (5) experimental pedagogy, (6) problem-posing and (7) task-driven pedagogy.

Apart from these seven findings, we also analysed the 'Chinese characteristics' embedded in the pedagogies, namely the element of ideological and political education. The promotion of this in Chinese HE aims to consolidate the status of Marxism in philosophy and social science teaching, further promoting Chinese President Xi Jinping's ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Tan, 2019). Tan also pointed out the requirements of characteristic demonstration classes: the core course of this class should be social science, the design of the class should implement the Marxism ideology, and the teachers should possess proper teaching skills and support the Communist Party of China (CPC). The international impact of implementing this policy has not yet been identified, which implies the necessity of conducting further research, i.e., providing

suggestions for future pedagogies in universities with a large number of Chinese international students.

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