

# An Analysis of the Impact of Undergraduate Education on Students' Physical and Psychological Growth in China

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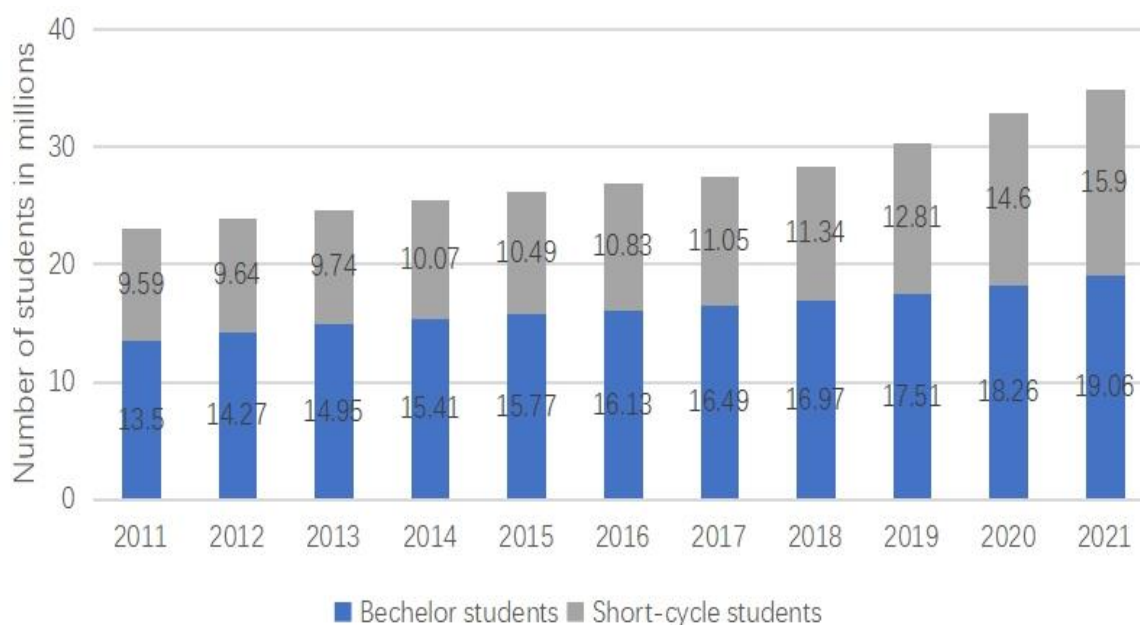
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**Abstract.** With the gradual popularization of higher education, the influence of undergraduate education on students' physical and mental development has aroused more and more attention. It is found that students' physical and mental condition is closely related to undergraduate education and has a significant influence on it. Hence, it is vital to explore the relationship between these two variables. But these potential effects have not been published in detail and systematically by some researchers. Based on the literature analysis method, this paper mainly starts with the current situation of undergraduate education in China. It first analyzes the four main parts of Chinese education, then analyzes the positive and harmful influence on students caused by these parts, and finally puts forward suggestions for future improvement. The research significance of this paper is that it hopes to provide some improvement measures for university education in China, so as to make college students get better physical and mental development.

**Keywords:** Chinese universities, undergraduate education, physical and psychological development.

## 1. Introduction

In an era of a knowledge-based society, undergraduate education for Chinese tertiary education is a valued concept. The value orientation of university education is to focus on professional education and cultivate high-quality professionals. At present, Chinese universities enroll millions of undergraduates every year, ranking first in the world. Figure 1 shows the enrollment of college students in China in recent years. It can be seen that a trend experienced by the number of college students is ascending constantly during the period from 2011 to 2021, which also proves that tertiary education becomes more prevalent among Chinese students.



**Fig 1.** Number of undergraduate students enrolled at public colleges and universities in China from 2011 to 2021 [1]

However, due to the features of current universities, Qian (2011) pointed out that undergraduate education in China remains to be facilitated [2]. Moreover, according to Ge (2015), college students, the main group in college education, have some bad lifestyle and study habits, such as insufficient sleep time, unrestrained nightlife, addiction to smoking and drinking, and casual coping with exams and homework [3]. All these seriously damage the physical and mental health of college students. As the most direct way of education, only by paying attention to students' physical and mental development and internal management can undergraduate education achieve deeper reform and provide students with a better educational environment. Therefore, this article will figure out the fundamental information about Chinese undergraduate education and how it affects the students' physical and mental growth and then propose some practical strategies.

## **2. The Current Situation of Undergraduate Education**

The following article will show the current situation of undergraduate education in Chinese universities from several aspects, which correspond to campus system, curriculum, homework, and faculty respectively.

### **2.1. Campus System**

University, such a standardized place has its own rules and regulations. Among the many systems in a school, the teaching system is one that directly faces the students and manages them. In addition, the teaching system of a school is definitely related to the organization and management of daily teaching activities and classroom teaching arrangements. Based on this system, students are administrated to obey the rules on what time to attend class and observe classroom discipline.

### **2.2. Schools' Curriculum**

Regarding the schools' curriculum, schools usually open different course modules according to the different majors of students. These courses are different from year to year, with easy to difficult and shallow to deep patterns. Most schools use a credit system, where students need to complete credits for each required and elective course in order to proceed to the next academic year. Moreover, the school also offers other courses to enrich the daily life of college students, such as physical education, video, and logical and political courses. There are some drawbacks to the curriculum set. For example, it is worth noting that some research universities neglect freshman year [4]. So there is a phenomenon that the freshman curriculum is too simple and students do not pay more attention to it. Apart from this, there is a serious imbalance between elective and compulsory courses, and the choice of elective courses is very narrow. It is difficult for students to choose what they are interested in from the limited courses for deep learning. Consequently, students lack the initiative to explore many new fields they do not engage with before and can only passively accept the knowledge of required courses.

### **2.3. Homework**

When it comes to homework, plays a crucial role in teaching activities. By assigning homework, students can absorb and consolidate knowledge through it, teachers are also capable of finding problems through students' booklets and better adjusting the teaching methodology. However, Wang and Ye (2015) illustrated that there are some problems with homework assignments in Chinese universities [5]. One point is that the number of assignments is small and the frequency is low, which may lead students to a careless and perfunctory attitude. The second problem is the single type of homework. It only has some traditional forms of exams or exercises. The form and content of homework cannot be innovated, and students will be tired of homework to a certain extent. Another point that needs to be noticed is that if everyone has the same homework requirements, some academic misconduct will inevitably occur, and students will copy each other, which will be a vicious circle. The last problem is the lack of a homework feedback mechanism in the homework process.

Students cannot get timely feedback on their homework so they cannot find their weaknesses and strengths clearly.

## **2.4. Faculty Structure**

In terms of teaching staff structure, Chinese universities recruit experienced teachers with advanced degrees to teach students. In recent years, as more and more college students go abroad for further study, more and more qualified teachers are applying for jobs in colleges and universities. The internationalization of teachers adds strength to the teaching team of Chinese universities, which also means the improvement of the teaching level and comprehensive strength of the schools. Nevertheless, not all schools' teaching staff quality is improving. One view is that the quality of teachers is inconsistent with their academic qualifications and abilities. Many teachers may have excellent resumes, but their teaching abilities are not recognized by students fully.

## **3. Influence on Students' Physical and Mental Development**

The next vital part that has to be mentioned is the influence of the current situation of undergraduate education, which has a correlation with the physical and mental development of contemporary college students. All the aspects of school education mentioned above have a direct or indirect effect on students' physical and mental development.

### **3.1. The Effect Brought by the Campus System**

First of all, the basic discussion involves whether the teaching system is scientific and fair. The campus system, as a tool for school management and student restraint, aims to raise students' awareness of rules and give proper supervision and guidance on students' daily behavior. If the campus system is scientific and fair, it will enhance students' sense of identity in the school. In the future, students will go out of campus, and this recognition of rules will guide students to abide by the law and act according to the workplace's system [6]. If the campus system is not humanized enough, there will be some phenomena of squeezing students and shielding teachers. Students will have inimical emotions and ignore the activities under the rules and regulations so that they do not agree with their own school at all, have an antipathy to the systems, and even do some behaviors that damage the reputation of teachers and the school under the control of their emotions.

### **3.2. The Influence of Curriculum**

Secondly, the school offers ideological and political courses, which directly enrich students' ideological and political education, regulating students' ideology, and preventing some students from being invaded by the university environment. Moreover, some courses related to ideological and political education also require students to do some voluntary service activities in their hometown or community during the winter and summer vacation. Students are required to provide a related certificate before they can complete the credits. Zhao (2022) analyzed that this mandatory requirement lays a foundation for students' voluntary service, cultivating their dedicated spirit, and providing spiritual guidance for their daily life in the future [7]. After entering the sophomore year, the courses students are mainly specialized courses. After three years of systematic learning of specialized courses, the comprehensive quality of students has been improved. Different from high school, students will master more professional and detailed knowledge during undergraduate education. Cai and Wang (2022) predicted that the learning content of different majors also guides the career development direction of students [8]. Most students will send resumes and choose positions based on their professional knowledge before graduation. Of course, some problems in the curriculum are also worth discussing. As the school and leaders did not attach importance to the crucial role of freshman year in the undergraduate year, the courses of freshman year were not in-depth enough, and the setting of some preparatory courses and basic courses and the testing of students' abilities were very simple, which led to the fact that students did not take the initiative to

form good learning habits in the early stage of freshman year. For the most part, they treat each assignment perfunctorily and only review it carefully for the final exam. From another point of view, students' laziness is also encouraged, which is also seriously detrimental to students' physical and mental development. The second big problem with the curriculum is that schools offer too few elective courses, only some nominal electives that students are not interested in. As a result, students have to take courses that they do not like and cannot learn from just to get the credits. In some foreign universities, the elective courses they offer are more oriented towards interest courses, covering various content that students are interested in. These attractive electives are usually offered during evening hours and do not conflict with the required courses during the day. Students can choose elective courses they are interested in. Elective courses will not have examinations and will not affect students' academic results, which greatly improves the attendance rate of students taking elective courses. However, once the selection of elective courses in Chinese universities is narrow, students will have negative emotions towards the courses, which limits the cultivation of students' interests and personality development. Therefore, the general education of universities does not play a positive role in this situation.

### **3.3. The Impact of Homework Assignment**

The third thing needed mentioning is the impact of a homework assignment on students' physical and mental development. From the perspective of China's nine-year compulsory education, homework assignment is an indispensable part that students should finish every day. After a day of theoretical learning, students need to pass homework exercises to test whether they really master the knowledge. Especially in the period of high school, every senior high school student has to face a huge amount of homework every day. The purpose of these endless papers is to let students have enough confidence and experience to take part in the college entrance examination after many tests. It constructs academic norms and molds students' character, as well as fosters their ability to manage time, multitask and judge things. In contrast, the form and amount of homework in Chinese universities are not enough to enable students to use their knowledge. They think more about how to cope with homework, instead of letting homework improve their personal abilities, which also has negative consequences for students' physical and mental development.

### **3.4. The Impact of the Faculty Structure**

Finally, the structure of teachers should also be discussed. It can be noted that in recent years, the overall education level has improved year by year. More and more people are willing to study abroad, so there are more overseas teachers. The overall quality of teachers has been improved, and the number of overseas teachers has also been growing. The diversity of teachers enriches the classroom teaching content. Li (2020) presented that teachers' rich knowledge and vision let students hear the differences among different cultures from their mouths, and cultivate students' international vision and global outlook [9]. This will enable students to view international news and friends in line with the principles of cultural and racial equality, which is beneficial to students' physical and mental development. However, not all schools have excellent teachers. Many teachers are not qualified professionals, and their education and ability do not match, which exerts a negative influence on imparting knowledge to students and reducing students' learning efficiency.

## **4. Suggestions**

In general, in view of the above problems, undergraduate education should be changed in four mentioned aspects. The universities should first check the shortcomings and fill the gaps in the campus system. Once the teaching system and management system become perfect, they could be more convincing. Undeniably, school leaders and the Education Bureau also need to ensure the specificity and fairness of the teaching system. Only when the system is corrected will all activities on campus be carried out under the standard system. Teachers will reward and punish students

according to the modified system, which can avoid the occurrence of controversy. At the same time, students will be subject to management and the system will restrain their behaviors from crossing the line. Moreover, Chinese universities should pay more attention to strengthening their teacher group and employing more splendid professors to teach students more academically [10]. The bottom line is distinguishing experienced teachers from candidates. Furthermore, there should be more homework for students, especially for some practical work. Students can have more opportunities to expose to society and some people of different ages whom they cannot meet in school. The content and forms of assignments still need to be innovated. Only in this way can students have the power to figure out the principle in the books and integrate theory with practice. Besides, Shen (2008) suggested that the undergraduate education of Chinese universities also needs to incorporate the good practices of foreign countries, such as focusing on students' mental health needs and opening some psychological counseling institutions [6]. Schools are also supposed to improve the construction of the campus's cultural environment and material environment and provide students with a good learning environment and atmosphere based on external environmental factors. Admittedly, after seeing the beautiful campus buildings and perfect facilities, students will mentally remind themselves that they should restrain themselves every day and try to study cultural knowledge hard. The second concrete example that can be adopted is to learn from the United States. Universities of different natures should find their own position, focusing on the characteristics of each major and department. Meanwhile, to realize the differentiation of school running, Chinese undergraduate education should propel the progress of general education while giving priority to the characteristic advantages of different types of universities [11].

## 5. Conclusion

The article first finds the relationship between Chinese undergraduate education and students' physical and mental growth. Then, the article analyses the present situation and problems that existed in Chinese universities and demonstrate the profound impacts of the typical structure of school systems from four perspectives, including teaching system, curriculum, homework, and faculty structure. They do bring students useful or some detrimental consequences with regard to the establishment of morally sound values and outlook on the world and study. Next, it puts forward specific improvement suggestions for four factors. The research on Chinese undergraduate education paves the way for the future of students' development in their university stage and makes up for the blank of undergraduate education on the physical and mental impact of students. It has significance to improve the management and teaching level of the school in order to better provide students with advanced education, which is also contributing to the higher level of undergraduate education in China. Of course, there are some limitations in this study, which mainly targets most universities in China. The article only presents a few phenomenon and does not represent all colleges and universities. What is more, the universities are accountable for not only four aspects but other services that are not taken into account. Therefore, if it is necessary to further explore the impact of undergraduate education on students' physical and mental development, it should be discussed from a more all-sided direction.

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