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Possible solutions to difficulties of value education through English teaching in Chinese schools

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Abstract

It is the fundamental task of education in China to train talents with right values and professional skills. For this purpose, value education should be carried out in all fields of basic education, vocational education and higher education. Strengthening value education through subject teaching is an important carrier and concrete practice to implement the fundamental task of socialist ideological education. The organic integration of value education with subject teaching is conducive to promoting virtue cultivation in all kinds of subjects. Combining value education with the teaching of English in Chinese schools meets the practical needs of cultivating foreign language personnel with both virtue and talent in the new era. Teachers, teaching materials and pedagogy are the basic elements of curriculum implementation, and the key factors for high quality value education in English teaching.

Keywords: Value education, English teaching, primary and secondary schools

1. Introduction

Cultivating good virtues through English education is a necessary requirement to follow the laws of education and return to the origin of education, as well as a necessary path to train future English talents for China. In 2018, at the National Education Conference, Chinese General Party Secretary, Mr. Xi Jinping, answered a series of fundamental questions about education in the new era, such as "what kind of people should be trained, the proper ways of educating them, and the purpose of education". He emphasized the need to integrate value education into all aspects of cultural and intellectual education, and throughout all fields of basic education, vocational education and higher education. It is the fundamental task of education in China and the high embodiment of the state will. The concept of value education in all the school subjects is in line with the key meaning of value, and it is an important carrier and concrete practice to implement moral education (Wang & Xiao, 2021) ^[6]. In the context of globalization and internationalization, foreign language education is facing the opportunity and challenge of reform. In primary and secondary school foreign language teaching, the integration of the main stream values and state wills with the teaching content will ensure the high quality of language education, and promote the development of the core literacy of the subject. The high degree of unity between the instrumental and humanist nature of English education in China's primary and secondary schools will reflect the national ideology and mainstream socialist core values. The teacher, teaching materials, and teaching methods are the three key factors to ensure the organic blending of value education with English teaching.

2. The connotation of value education in English teaching in schools of China

Value education embedded in the instruction of different courses refers to a comprehensive educational concept that takes moral education as the fundamental task of education, deeply explores the value cultivating resources in various courses, so that courses of different fields and specialized political and ideological courses will guide the students to develop in the same direction and form a synergistic effect with a comprehensive educational network with whole staff, complete educational process, and covering all courses.

This concept emphasizes that in addition to language knowledge transfer and linguistic skill training, English teaching has a role to play in ideological and political education.

In addition to the explicit value of mastering English as a communication tool, English course in primary and secondary schools should present its instrumental as well humanistic features and promote the comprehensive improvement of students' language ability, cultural awareness, cultural confidence and learning ability. The integration of value education with English teaching can help promote the harmonious coexistence of instrumental and humanistic nature of English for the Chinese students at schools. The teachers, teaching materials and pedagogy are the pre-conditions for the integration and the basic elements of the curriculum construction. They are the lifelines to ensure the quality of English-based value education.

3. Comprehensive development of English learners

Instrumental and humanistic natures are the essential attributes of Chinese English education. For a long time, foreign language education in primary and secondary schools in China has favored instrumental nature and neglected the cultivation of humanistic qualities and thinking ability of the students, resulting in students' lack of motivation and diminished pragmatic ability. It is a logical starting point for teachers to realize the orientation of education and the need for students' all-round development. The organic unity of the instrumental and humanistic natures of English education has pioneering educational significance. The combination of value education with English teaching is the internal driving force for the innovation of foreign language curriculum practice which provides the scaffolding for language knowledge learning and application and realizes the unity of social needs and personal development.

In addition to the function of helping students to acquire language knowledge and skills, the teaching materials of English contain a rich value content. Students should not only learn to use the foreign language to communicate with others, but also to improve their logic thinking and encyclopedic knowledge. The content of an English course imbedded with right values and good virtues involves both the introduction of the target language culture and spreading the splendid Chinese culture abroad. Then how can we properly achieve a balance between the cultural importing and exporting? The foreign language education in primary and secondary schools is part of the Chinese national curriculum, and the teaching content and the setting of its objectives both reflect the will of the state. The implementation of the foreign language education in schools of China must adhere to purpose of the general national education of China. The concept of value education provides the cognitive basis for knowledge, forming backbone of students' cultural confidence and

deciding the quality of talent training. The implementation of value education in English subject is a prerequisite for realizing the goals of the curriculum and a necessary prerequisite for a balanced cross-cultural communication.

The new era has put forward new requirements for foreign language education in primary and secondary schools, with particular attention to the cultivation of intercultural communication skills. Language teaching should not only cultivate students' language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, but also introduce the broad cultural contents behind the language. The imbedded value education in English teaching explains the way to implement the curriculum with the essence of "virtue" and guide the teaching of the subject in a comprehensive way to ensure that knowledgeable talents have good virtues. Value education in English teaching should become the guiding principle of selecting foreign language teaching methods in primary and secondary schools, requiring teachers to choose their teaching methods in a measured and precise way and innovatively use the teaching materials in the text books, but avoiding the possibility of abusing and misusing teaching methods to a large extent. Specifically, when teachers choose teaching methods, they should take value education into consideration to realize the goal of fostering virtue through foreign language education in the new era.

4. The difficulties of English language course-based value education in schools of China

4.1 The low degree of awareness of the teachers

Teachers are the main force to promote the change and development of school education and have a leading role in teaching reform. At present, foreign language teachers in primary and secondary schools have a certain degree of cognitive bias towards the construction of English subject-based value education. For one thing, teachers do not have the necessary awareness of the importance of value education in English teaching. In their eyes it is the higher educational institutions that should implement curricula-based value education with university students, and at the basic education stage only teachers who specialize in moral and political education should take up the task. Consequently, this misconception makes it difficult for them to have in-depth cooperation with teachers of other subjects to course-based value education into practice. Secondly, teachers have a one-sided understanding of the attributes and values of foreign language courses in terms of subject functions. They only recognize the instrumental nature of a foreign language, and mainly adopt examination-oriented intensive training teaching methods which often result in the low comprehensive pragmatic competence of the students. Thirdly, in their body of knowledge, there is perhaps no such content related with the value education. The present urgent need is to raise their awareness and upgrade their knowledge structure to optimize their comprehensive quality on the basis of ensuring the advancement of ideology.

4.2 Problems in the use of the teaching materials

As the main carrier of teaching contents, teaching materials are concerned with the realization of teaching objectives. Teachers should creatively explore the value education elements in designated textbooks and develop teaching materials related to them. However, English teachers in primary and secondary schools overemphasize the cultural input of the target language in their teaching materials and

neglect the value education function of the teaching materials. For one thing, teachers fail to fully recognize the implicit value cultivating elements in the teaching materials, resulting in the failure to develop students' ideology and national consciousness in the formulation of teaching objectives. The national consciousness embodied in value education is the fundamental prerequisite for students' all-round development and the boundless soil that nourishes students' growth. Secondly, teachers do not have proper methods to increase the teaching content of value education in the use of teaching materials, and they miss the opportunities for ideology education in English teaching.

On the other hand, if teachers can observe and collect materials in daily life and integrate them into English teaching materials, it will be helpful to eliminate the commonly existing phenomenon of the absence of native culture in English learning, thus enhancing students' cultural awareness and ability to transmit Chinese culture in English. Third, teachers lack the ability to develop teaching materials that integrate the concept of thinking and government in the curriculum. Thirdly, teachers lack the ability to develop teaching materials that integrate the concept of Chinese value education. English teaching materials that integrate value education require teachers to systematize the knowledge content and help students establish correct native cultural values, taking into account the characteristics of primary and secondary school students.

4.3 problems with the choice of teaching methods

Teachers can transform ideology into students' internal literacy through certain pedagogical approaches in classroom teaching practice. However, due to the gap between the teacher's awareness and the requirements, teachers have not yet fully taken value education as an organic part of English teaching, and face many challenges in the choice of teaching methods and the innovative applications. First, the teaching method is away from the concept of value education based on English teaching. Traditional "indoctrination" teaching, which is still widely used in English classroom, emphasizes the teacher's authoritative explanation and neglects the students' experience of language communication, which leads to the reduced teaching outcomes^[5]. In language communication, speakers usually combine information, culture and ideology, which makes it an inevitable and practical path to embed value cultivation. Students will be led to the desired ideology and value system by osmosis in such an infiltrative environment. Secondly, it is difficult for the teachers to integrate the concept of value education into the overall teaching process. Although some teachers have noticed the connection between the concept of value education and native cultural awareness, and have begun to take the initiative to combine value teaching elements, the concept is only reflected in certain teaching stages. Thirdly, it is impossible to realize ideological connotation of value education since the teachers lack of creativity and imagination in the concrete practice of value education – embedded English teaching in primary and secondary schools, and diversified teaching ideas such as online and offline integration.

5. Possible solutions to difficulties of value education via English teaching

Foreign language education in primary and secondary schools is the foundation for cultivating talents who are

global and international, therefore teachers should not neglect the cultivation of students' linguistic competence under the guidance of advanced values, nor should they cut off, suspend or misuse the key meaning of value education embedded in English teaching. The organic combination of "knowledge transfer" and "value leadership" in English teaching can only be realized through the construction of curriculum system which is student-centered and based on the three dimensions of teachers, teaching materials and pedagogy.

6. A. The self –development of teachers

6.1 Awareness raising

The prior condition of what people to train is who the trainers are. Teachers are the first responsible person for foreign language curriculum reform and value education via English teaching. English teachers in primary and secondary schools should take the initiative to think about their double responsibility in nurturing people, and keep their ideas advanced in terms of native cultural awareness. Then they will be able to unite the core elements of foreign language teaching and value incarnation with the attitude of a reformer, and create and design high-quality English classroom activities which embedded value education based on linguistic knowledge and content of the teaching materials.

6.1 Understanding the students

Teachers need to be aware that although English is only a subject at the basic education stage to implement the concept of value education, it is directly related to the future personnel training for China. Primary and secondary school students are in the critical period of their life, and their bodies and minds are not yet mature. Teachers need to break through the solidified consciousness and thinking inertia of implementing foreign language courses at the basic education stage, and strengthen the ideological education of primary and secondary school students.

6.3 Cooperating with the school leaders and teachers of other subjects

Teachers need to use their brains and practice diligently in the value education practice via English teaching, and gradually acquire the ability to develop curriculum resources, seeking the support from school leaders and strengthening the collaboration with teachers of other subjects. Based on sharing and co-construction of subject resources, English teachers can contribute their big share to formation of large framework of value education in English teaching in primary and secondary schools

6.4 Teaching practice

Teachers' creativity, excellent teaching skills and evolving professionalism are important guarantees for value education via English teaching. Being responsible for spreading language and culture, teachers need to improve their professionalism since consciously cultivated moral sentiment will help teachers to systematically recognize cultural differences between China and the target language countries from a cross-cultural perspective, so that they will be able to identify cultural phenomena and understand cultural connotations, adopt different expressions to present and spread Chinese culture, evaluate concepts, views and worldviews in English texts with correct ideology [6], improve the understanding of different cultures, and prepare adequately for the implementation of value education

embedded in English teaching. Teachers should really engage in research activities as learning subjects, taking part in thematic seminars and contributing their share to the new curriculum construction of fostering virtue through English language education. They can write teaching cases of value education etc., and apply the gains from the activities to specific teaching practices.

7. Innovating the teaching materials

Teaching materials are essential elements for teachers to transmit knowledge and important channels for students to acquire knowledge, and they also support the shaping of values and ideology while carrying teaching contents. In view of the international nature of the English course, to preserve the originality of the materials, the textbooks are compiled, the the compilers of the text books ignore the erosion of students' values and ideology caused by teaching materials to some extent, which leads to the loss of students' cultural and ideological security in their native language^[7]. The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2011 Edition) suggests that teachers should actively develop and make rational use of various curriculum resources, including pictures and videos, which are an important part of English curriculum implementation^[8].

8. Adding value education teaching objective

It is necessary to freshen up the objective system of English knowledge and skills, teaching process and method, and value education, and put the value education objective at the level of "emotion and value", reflecting the dual teaching objectives^[9]. For example, in the integrated skills lesson of 8A Unit4 DIY section, we set the teaching objective of "being able to introduce the outstanding achievements of ancient craftsmen in China in English".

9. Exploring value education elements in English textbooks in depth

They should use the teaching materials as a basis to discover the elements of value education embedded in them or the integration points of value education in the context of the topic. In 8B Unit 6 Reading, the story of disabled athletes is introduced. Teachers can guide students to find materials about the Chinese

women's volleyball team winning the championship, so as to cultivate students to carry forward the spirit of women's volleyball and serve the motherland with practical actions (Wen, 2021)^[7]. In 9B Unit2 Great People, in addition to introducing Armstrong who landed on the moon in the textbook, a theme-based workshop can be conducted with China's space heroes to inspire students' national pride and patriotism (He, 2018)^[2].

10. Encouraging students to read relevant materials after class

Teachers expand the boundaries of textbook teaching materials and guide the students to read more materials for value education based on the topic and English linguistic knowledge learned.

11. Changing the way of teaching

To effectively integrate value education into English teaching, teachers should learn to combine English language knowledge teaching, communicative ability training and value education organically.

Teachers need to adhere to the educational philosophy of nurturing people, uphold the spirit of unity of knowledge and action, integrate advanced culture embodying the elements of value education into the curriculum in educational practice, and provide students with a context of mainstream value inculcation. In teaching practice, teachers need to design and plan the teaching objectives and contents in detail so as to gradually form an integrated curriculum implementation system of teaching-learning-assessment of value education combined with English teaching (Li&Rao, 2019)^[3].

12. Using flexible teaching methods

To achieve the purpose of value education in English teaching, teachers can adopt a flexible way in class. For instance, the comparative analysis method can be chosen when analyzing the cultural differences from the perspective of East and West, and help students to enhance their comprehensive language skills from cross-cultural perspective (Xu, 2021)^[8]. In teaching practice, infiltration method can be used in various teaching activities in primary and secondary schools under the premise of closely integrating English curriculum standards and socialist core values, such as presenting example sentences and evaluating exercises, so that students' feelings of love for the country can flow naturally. For example, when teaching the grammar point of "exclamatory sentence", teachers may take the example of the Chinese government organizing the whole nation to fight against the Covid-19 and make up exclamatory sentences related with the topic (Lin, 2021)^[4]. This will not only deeply resonate with students' emotions, but also enable them to grasp the grammatical structure of exclamatory sentences naturally. Students develop language skills in the context and achieve a high degree of unity between the humanistic and instrumental nature of English language teaching.

13. Using new information technology

Teachers should make full use of new information technology tools such as cell phones, whiteboards and mobile Internet to promote innovation in foreign language classroom teaching, and reflect the connotation and elements of English language embedded value education in MOOC, micro-class and virtual classroom. For example, they may try selecting Chinese movies as foreign language course resources and introduce them into the classroom, and organize students to translate and elaborate the lines and topics in the movies online, so as to realize the unity of shaping students' personality and spirit, and cultivating their unity of knowledge and action (An, 2018)^[1].

In conclusion, English, as a major subject in basic education, should respond positively to the curriculum construction of subject-based value education. The construction of English curriculum focuses on training personnel with both knowledge and good virtues and achieving co-development of instrumental and humanist nature of foreign language discipline. Although value education is based on subject teaching, it does not stop there. The present study of the theoretical base and strategies for English subject-based value education is just the starting point, and there are still many issues to be considered and proven. For example, how to establish a long-term mechanism for the curriculum construction in terms of policy protection and educational evaluation. The subject-based value education is a proven way for the cultivation citizens' national consciousness

(Wang & Xiao, 2021) ^[6].

The current English teaching, from the knowledge structure of teachers to the set content of teaching materials, focuses on the cultivation of language skills and the introduction of Western thought and culture, speaking mostly about Westerners and Western affairs, and the culture and thought exported through the language can influence, change or even subvert students' citizenship identities (Pang & Wei, 2021) ^[6]. If we do not strengthen the cultivation of national consciousness in the teaching process in a timely manner to help the young students, whose world view and values are in the "nurturing" stage, to establish a conscious cultural subject awareness of the excellent Chinese traditional culture and the great achievements of the country's socialist construction, form a discerning perspective, and develop a national cultural confidence and a world cultural view of "harmony and differences", then our English education will not be able to answer the fundamental questions of "for whom and what to train" in foreign language education (Xu, 2021) ^[10]. There is still a large space for the study of research and practice on the curriculum construction of English subject-based value education in primary and secondary schools of China.

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