

On the Humanistic Connotation and Value of English Education

Kanglin Zheng

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies South China Business College, Guangzhou,
Guangdong, China

Abstract

By examining the humanistic connotation and value of English education, this paper aims to reveal the causes for the deviation of English education practice, and show the great importance of finding a practical path for the development of English education. This can not only reflect the value concern for English education as well as the deep understanding of the relationship among people, language and education, but also help clarify the future direction of English education and promote the return of its true value.

Keywords

English Education; Humanistic Connotation; Value.

1. Humanistic Connotation and Value of English Education

(1) English education improves cognitive level and thinking ability

The English language shows the native English-speaking countries' experience, perception and exposition of nature, social perspective and spiritual world in the process of self-growth, social life and historical evolution, which is the essence of their achievements in understanding themselves and the world around them. In addition, the English language also represents a new way of thinking which is roughly different from Chinese in terms of conceptual categories, expressive logic and systems, providing learners with a way to understand the world from a differentiated perspective and a thinking tool to create new concepts and new knowledge. When students encounter completely different cognitive results and ways from their existing cognitive system in English learning, their inherent cognitive system will be greatly impacted and challenged. In the course of their trying to understand and adapt to the new spiritual results, along with the attempt to control and use the new cognitive system and tools, their internal cognitive structure will be constantly broken, adjusted and reconstructed, the openness and adaptability of their cognitive system will be improved, a more comprehensive and profound way of understanding the world, society and themselves will be shaped, and their rigorous and critical thinking will be deepened.

(2) English education cultivates sympathy and understanding for foreign cultures

In English textbooks, there are substantial language materials about British and American history, geography, people, festivals, customs, religion and other cultural contents, which become an important channel for students to understand British and American culture. In the acquaintance and understanding of foreign cultures, students are bound to observe the differences and similarities between Chinese culture and English culture, so as to get a deeper insight into the extensive and profound Chinese culture and appreciate the subtlety of foreign cultures. This will facilitate students to understand the cultural knowledge about national psychology, life and history carried by the language, and cultivate their sympathy and understanding for foreign cultures.

2. The Loss of Humanistic Connotation and Value of English Education in China

(1) Adhering to the educational concept of “instrumentalism”

For a long time, English education in the elementary education stage has been limited to the “instrumentalism” thought that pursues efficiency as the goal, while individuality, which is supposed to be predominant to promote human development, inspire people to pursue beauty and truth and liberate them, has been marginalized. Meanwhile, the truth, goodness and beauty of language itself are covered, the humanistic value of language education is imprisoned, and the growth of students in all aspects is also strangled.

(2) Unification of curriculum evaluation

Among the hundreds of courses offered by more than 1,000 institutions of higher learning in China, English is the only mandatory national unified examination subject. English test score has become the most authoritative evaluation criterion of English courses, and such a “unified” approach forces students to undermine their own understanding and needs. In this evaluation, students’ interests, motives, expectations and personality qualities are no longer considered, and all of them are reviewed and fixed by the detailed rules of the English test. The “baton effect” of English test is abnormally magnified, and its procedures and standardization cut up the process of English teaching and learning. Vocabulary, grammar, listening and reading have become the “standard parts” of English teaching and learning, while classroom teaching is just an assembly line. In the presence of regional differences, different source of students and disparity in faculty in many colleges and universities, the unification of a teaching syllabus, a curriculum model, a one-size-fits-all evaluation system and a set of textbooks applied to all foreign language classrooms of the whole school or even the whole country goes against the implementation of the principle of individualized teaching and the improvement of foreign language learning efficiency.

(3) Teachers and students lose themselves

With the development of modern science and technology, on the one hand, English education presents high efficiency, technicality and procedure in imparting knowledge and cultivating skills in line with the modernization process; on the other hand, it reveals that it lays emphasis on knowledge than on emotion, on science than on morality, as well as on intellectual education than on humanistic quality; from the perspective of teaching methods, it focuses more on “indoctrination” than on “edification”, as well as on external standards and requirements than on internal feelings and experiences. The utilitarian consciousness of “social orientation” has been gradually formed on education, which inevitably leads to the loss of humanistic connotation and value function to some extents. English pass rate has become the only explanation and existence form of “information” delivered by English courses. Teachers’ classroom teaching must be carried out under the principle of strictly adhering to “standards”. Moreover, static and inflexible English teaching syllabus and curriculum operation directly result in the lack of “self” of teachers and students in English education.

3. The Return of Humanistic Connotation and Value of English Education

(1) Change of concept: from instrumental rationality to humanistic spirit

The instrumental rationality of English education leads to the loss of English goals. In order to realize the true value of English education, it is necessary to change the concept of language from instrumentalism to humanism, and the concept of English education from practical efficiency to human development. The essence of education is the development of human being, the exaltation of human nature, the development of affection, virtue, aesthetic experience and critical thinking ability, and the development of the whole person guided by the future life and

the release of human nature. If educators cannot cast off the educational concept of instrumentalism, they cannot discover the true value of education and grasp the truth, goodness and beauty of English education from a syllable, a tone, a word and a sentence. If the practitioners of English education cannot get rid of the idea of a single instrumental purpose, they will not be able to create educational activities conducive to students' spiritual growth and life growth in practice, and will fail to see the rich experience and growth of students' mind and cognition brought by English education. "English education should have both instrumental rationality and humanistic spirit. Only based on the humanistic spirit of English education, we can find more effective ways and means on how to use and master its instrumentality. At the same time, the humanistic spirit of English education cannot exist independently of instrumental rationality, because only when the transmission and expression of humanistic content in English education are combined with the training of knowledge culture and basic skills can the whole process of English education be unified." Therefore, educators should alter their thinking and take the comprehensive development of human beings as the yardstick to measure English education, focusing on both its instrumental value and its humanistic connotation.

(2) Establishing the evaluation system under the humanistic background

Under the humanistic background, the evaluation system breaks through the previous knowledge-based framework and pays more attention to the students' emotional attitude, psychological quality, degree of participation, and the training process of practical ability, so that the evaluation method is more scientific, reflected in:

Firstly, the evaluation subject is diversified. The evaluation subject should not be individual, but should include students themselves, student evaluation group and teacher evaluation group. Evaluation is not only the evaluation of teachers and students, but also the evaluation of self-evaluation and classmates. In the whole learning process, students constantly experience feedback, reflection and evaluation, so that evaluation becomes an open process full of human care and understanding, as well as a process of learning, experience and development.

Secondly, the evaluation method is diversified. The previous single summative evaluation system should be transformed into formative evaluation. Formative evaluation focuses on the change and development of students in the learning process, which can be either tested or untested. In adopting test-based evaluation, blindly copying all kinds of language examination questions and designs should be avoided, and instead more subjective examination questions should be applied, enabling students to have the opportunity to experience the progress and achievements of learning, as well as teachers to observe and understand students from multiple perspectives. Non-testing evaluation forms can be carried out in various manners, such as group discussion or demonstration activity evaluation, homework evaluation, extracurricular activities participation comments, learning results summary, learning file package establishment, questionnaire survey, etc.

Thirdly, the education of evaluation content is humanization-oriented. In the evaluation process, the concept of education should be integrated. In the positive evaluation, the behavior of students in the learning process should be encouraged and praised with the use of encouraging comments to guide them from the positive side. The content of evaluation includes intellectual factors and non-intellectual factors, so that it is conducive to the development of students' self-consciousness, the improvement of self-reflection and self-practice ability, the establishment of students' self-confidence, the realization of harmonious and healthy development, and the fundamental purpose of evaluation.

(3) Exploring the emotional resources in English textbooks to stimulate the inner motivation of students' learning

Foreign language learning is not only a cognitive process, but also an emotional process. When teachers carry out teaching activities to students based on textbooks, there is not only the transmission of cognitive information between teachers, textbooks and students, but also the exchange of emotional information. D.P. Ausubel, an American educational psychologist, proposed two prerequisites for meaningful learning: one is that learners have a cognitive structure to assimilate new materials, while the other is the learners' intention of meaningful learning, which emphasizes the cognitive and emotional conditions of meaningful learning. In the field of higher education, English curriculum is regarded as an important medium to convey the cognitive and practical achievements of people from different cultures, as well as human cultural materials such as values, aesthetic tastes and moral standards. However, the English education circle has not been able to get out of the mire of educational utilitarianism, paying more attention to imparting knowledge than to excavating cultural, emotional and aesthetic connotations. How can we turn emotionally rich materials into incentives to stimulate students' inner motivation, so as to be the direction of students' learning willingness? Firstly, it is to develop emotional strategies. Teachers should process and refine textbooks, and explore the emotional factors hidden in the textbook contents. Then, it is to show emotional strategies. Teachers should first deeply experience the emotion conveyed in the teaching material, and stimulate the students' emotional experience through the emotional preparation of the lesson, skillful design of the introduction, emotional reading, comments on the key words and phrases and so on.

4. Conclusion

Now in the era of "great revolution of foreign language education", language is more directly correlated with cognition, society, culture, psychology, thinking, emotion, behavior, quality and other aspects, and the requirements for language teaching are higher and higher. The government, schools and society should examine, evaluate and deepen reform the rationality of English education's inherent teaching modes and ideas, the output of teaching benefits and the standardization of educational value system, so as to perfectly and organically combine the external instrumental rationality of English education with the internal humanistic connotation and value shaping function.

References

- [1] Arnold, J. *Affect in Language Learning* [M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2000.
- [2] Lihua Liang. Humanistic value and radial thinking of English teaching in middle schools [J]. *English Teacher*, 2020, 20(17):174-175, 178.
- [3] Jing Yuan. Connotation and Analysis of the Current Situation of Humanistic Value of English Language Teaching in Basic Disciplines [J]. *Journal of Jialing University*, 2015, 33(10):75-80.
- [4] Moore, T.W. *Educational Theory: An Introduction* [M]. London: Routledge, 2012.
- [5] Chunsheng Wang, Bao Wang. Humanistic Education in College English Based on Value Clarification [J].