

An Overview of Studies on Moral Education in Foreign Language Courses

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Abstract: Foreign language courses with moral education elements have been widely studied recently. This paper overviews studies on Foreign language courses with moral education elements in the articles from Chinese journals of CNKI database in the past five years by means of visual analysis software. It summarizes the research focus of published papers, reviews the meaning, the scope, exploration and evaluation of moral education elements, and then explains the future implications. It has been found that in the past five years, the moral education research of foreign language courses has continued to rise; and the research hotspots mainly focus on curriculum design, college teaching reform and moral education elements extraction.

Keywords: Moral Education, Foreign language courses, Overview.

1. Introduction

In December 2017, the Ministry of Education of China issued a guiding Outline on Moral Education in Chinese Colleges and Universities. Since then, the concept of "Course Ideology and Moral Education" has been gradually promoted. In this context, colleges and universities have carried out curriculum ideological and moral teaching reforms oriented towards goals and by means such as "all kinds of courses go in the same direction with the ones on political theory" and "further dig the educating elements in the courses". The academic community is also fully aware of the importance of promoting the ideological and moral construction of foreign language courses at the national, social, academic and individual levels, and has analyzed this trend from different dimensions. Through imparting the moral education in curriculum, on the one hand, teachers can cultivate students' critical thinking ability, so that they can learn to view the differences between Chinese and Western languages and cultures objectively and rationally; on the other hand, teachers can also arouse students' patriotic feelings, enhance their cultural self-confidence and sense of cultural belonging, so as to help them establish correct cultural concepts and values. On the basis of clarifying the ideological and moral connotation of Foreign language courses, it is necessary to further review and overview the development, themes and contents of relevant researches in the past five years comprehensively and systematically, and analyze the research implications.

2. The Connotation of Moral Education in English Language Courses

The ideological and moral connotation of foreign language courses is the focus of academic circles. Zhang Jingyuan and Wang Na (2020) explained this concept from the perspective of education, combining teaching content, ability training, teaching methods, instructing capacity and other dimensions. They believe that moral education in the Foreign language courses is an integral part of teaching content, an important way to cultivate students' language ability, a new language teaching method, and a reflection of language teachers' ability

to conduct education. Hu Jiehui (2021) adopts a top-down approach to interpret the connotation of moral education in foreign language courses from the perspective of macro-level education policy with theories on curriculum and discipline organization. At the same year, based on her own teaching practice, Wen Qiufang (2021:52) proposed that the ideology and moral education of Foreign language courses should "be led by foreign language teachers, and effectively integrate the concept of morality education into all aspects of foreign language classroom, including foreign language teaching content, classroom management, evaluation system, teachers' oral guidance and behavior, etc. And teachers should be committed to playing an active role in shaping students' correct global outlook, cognition and values". Considering the view that moral education in foreign language courses is actually the integration of the educational concept of morality and cultivating people with multiple teaching methods, we hold that to conduct moral education in foreign language curriculum is to impart the concept of morality and cultivating people in the process of foreign language teaching, with teachers being the leading force and students the center, by fully tapping the ideological and moral elements in classroom teaching, continuously optimizing the teaching mode to enlighten the minds, and cultivate talents with global vision, humanistic quality, and cross-cultural communicative ability.

3. Research Design

The researchers took "ideological and moral education/elements in foreign language curriculum/courses" as the subject or topic, and took the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database as the data source for literature retrieval, and used the advanced retrieval function of CNKI to repeatedly combine subject headings to conduct literature search. The publication time span is from the year of 2018 to 2022, five years altogether. After intensive literature reading, and browsing titles and abstracts, we removed papers with low relevance or low focus from the search results, and finally a total of 440 related Chinese papers and 1 in English were retrieved. After that, visual analysis software was used to make a thematic review of those 441 essays. The following two questions are specifically explored: (1) How have the number and themes of papers focusing on ideological and moral education elements in the

foreign language courses changed in the past five years? (2) What are the major focal points of the moral education research in foreign language teaching in the past five years?

4. Results and Discussion

Data results and discussion about moral education in EFL teaching are presented in this part. The analysis of the current studies is unfolded from two major dimensions: research focus and research implication.

4.1. Research Focus

With the visual analysis of the papers, the research on the moral education in foreign language courses since 2018 can be roughly divided into two stages. The first phase was from 2018 to 2019, as the research was in its infancy, with only 30 relevant papers published. The second phase is from 2020 to 2022, as the research has entered a stage of rapid development, and the number of papers has begun to show a rapid growth trend. The increasing study interest can be attributed to the fact that the release of the “Guidelines for Ideological and Political Construction of Colleges and Universities” in 2020 and the construction of first-class majors and first-class courses have played a role in promoting this trend. The topic of “course ideology and moral education” has begun to attract widespread attention in domestic universities and disciplines. Topics such as “cultivating people with morality” and “all kinds of courses go together in the same direction with ideological and political theory courses” have become popular research topics in foreign language academia, which has also become the main reason for the sharp increase in the number of publications in this research field after 2020.

The implementation of the ideological and moral teaching system in specific curriculum involves all aspects of teaching reform, and the research focus of scholars in different fields are quite different. The researches related to moral education in foreign language curriculum can be roughly classified into four categories, namely: the interpretation of theories on morality and education; the source and extraction of ideological and moral elements in foreign language courses; the implementation path of ideological and moral elements in foreign language courses; and research on ideological and political evaluation of foreign language courses. Judging from the perspective of the theme, there are both theoretical analysis and teaching practice, which basically cover different dimensions of the ideological and moral construction of the curriculum, but there is a lack of exploration of the students’ values development and teachers’ professional growth in this context.

4.2. Research Implication

In view of the analysis and discussion above, the following three aspects can be explored in the future. First, to further enrich the research ranges. At the macro level, ecological education theory can be applied into exploring how to construct a good ecology of ideology and moral curriculum from macro, meso and micro perspectives. At the micro level, the detailed and in-depth research can be carried out around the talent cultivation goals and curriculum goals under the background of curriculum ideology and moral education, involving teachers, students, textbooks, courses, evaluation, teaching media, and teaching ecology, etc. Second, to further optimize the research method. The current status quo of speculative research based on literature analysis can be supplemented by using the means of educational ethnography,

narrative, life experience, and action research to collect relevant data through observation, questionnaires, interviews and other methods. Data analysis can be followed to make use of research results and draw more objective conclusion. For example, researchers can develop relevant curriculum ideological and moral assessment scales, questionnaires, etc. on the basis of solid research, and conduct diagnostic assessments on students. Third, to further construct a teaching and research community under the background of curriculum moral education, and constantly improve teachers’ awareness and skills relying on modern information technology. In addition to designing high-quality courses and organizing training lectures on course chains, colleges and universities can build up online and offline exchange platforms for discussing the moral education elements in foreign language courses, regularly carry out relevant teaching and research activities, in order to accelerate the establishment of a “capable” team, which is “a team of foreign language teachers who understand the meaning and importance of curriculum ideology and morality education and have the ability to implement curriculum moral education in practice”(Xiao&Huang, 2021:23). All those proposed approaches are believed to comprehensively promote the career growth of front-line teachers under the background of curriculum ideology and moral education.

5. Conclusion

According to the guiding principles in the “Outline”, ideology and moral education in college curriculum are the demands of the new era, and it is also a key measure to implement the fundamental task of moral education in higher education. Based on a visual analysis of 441 papers related to ideological and moral education research in foreign language courses published in the CNKI database from 2018 to 2022, we have found that: First, related research has shown a significant growth trend in the past five years and the research popularity has continued to rise. Second, the current leading research institutions in this field are mainly well-known foreign language institutions in China with their renowned scholars in the foreign language teaching and research circle. Third, during the past five years, related research has mainly focused on curriculum design, ideological and moral elements in foreign language courses. Three focal points, namely ideological and moral elements, college teaching reform, and ideological and moral education, are formed. It can be seen that the educational and scientific research personnel in China’s foreign language academia have made bold explorations around curriculum ideology and morality, and are fully aware of the great significance of implementing the moral education concepts of foreign language courses in today’s foreign language education community. It is believed that in the future, the majority of foreign language teachers will continue to update their concepts, further understand the importance of combining moral education with curriculum, and continue to reform the course design, classroom practice and teaching evaluation. Only in this way can we train outstanding foreign language talents in the new era with firm political stance, high cultural confidence, patriotism and international vision, and better achieve the goal of “presenting compelling China stories” to the outside world.

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