

An Analysis of the Causes and Characteristics of the Evolution of English Curriculum Objectives in the Compulsory Education Stage of China

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Abstract: This template explains an in-depth analysis of the causes and characteristics of the evolution of English curriculum objectives in the compulsory education stage of China to know the role of English course objectives in English education comprehensively. The factors affecting the curriculum objectives in the compulsory education stage that are: first are the changes in the social demand for English. Second is the transformation from teaching to education. And the third is continuous improvement of the English discipline itself. And the evolution characteristics of course objectives that are: (1) basic knowledge and basic skills always have been emphasized; (2) the needs for cultivating students' intercultural consciousness are increasingly prominent; (3) the emphasis on the instrumental value of English has shifted to the humanistic value of English.

Keywords: English curriculum objectives; Compulsory education stage; Evolutionary causes and characteristics

1. Introduction

Curriculum plays a core role in education and teaching. The content and value orientation of education is mainly reflected and implemented through curriculum. The English course objective in the compulsory education stage is the core issue of English curriculum evolution and innovation. Curriculum objectives guide the direction of English curriculum reform and stipulate the English curriculum setting and implementation, and main content. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the the causes and characteristics of the evolution of English curriculum objectives in the China compulsory education stage.

2. Evolution of English Curriculum Objectives

Since New China, the evolution of English curriculum objectives at the basic education level has been divided into three main stages. The first stage is the basic English curriculum objectives from 1949 to 1976. The second stage is the basic English course goals from 1977 to 2000. The third stage is the basic English curriculum objectives in the 21st century new course reformation stage.

2.1. English Curriculum Objectives from 1949 to 1976

There are three phases of English curriculum objectives in this historical period: the objectives of English curriculum in the socialist construction exploration period (1949-1955); English curriculum objectives in the comprehensive socialist period (1956-1966); English curriculum objectives during 1966 to 1976. The characteristics of the English curriculum objectives at this stage were: 1. Highlighted basic knowledge and skills. The basic knowledge and skills emphasized in this stage referred to pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, reading, etc. 2. Emphasized the patriotism of English curriculum objectives. Both the struggle against imperialism and the emphasis on "Red" and "Specialization" reflected the patriotism of the English curriculum objectives[1].

2.2. English Curriculum Objectives during the Reform and Opening Period

In October 1976, reforms began in the field of education. Compulsory education English course

ushered in a comprehensive recovery of the good times. With the gradual deepening of the course revolution, the objectives of English curriculum have shifted dramatically. The English curriculum after the reform and opening into three periods: the gradual recovery of the English curriculum in basic education (1977-1985); steady progress of the English curriculum in basic education (1986-1992); English curriculum adjustment in basic education (1993-2000).

From the syllabuses and relevant English education materials, the following characteristics of English curriculum can be found: (1) Handle language knowledge and language application, and cultivated students' communicative competence in English. (2) English education began to focus on the humanistic function of English curriculum, and to cultivate students' emotions, attitudes and values. (3) When compiling the syllabus, the compiler made necessary adjustments to the teaching requirements and contents to take into account the connection between the English curriculum of junior high school and senior high school.

2.3. English Curriculum Objectives in the 21st Century

From 1999, basic education course revolution guided by the quality-oriented education ideology had been initiated in China. The English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education was promulgated, which became the official national curriculum document for the implementation of compulsory education. It emphasized the people foremost, student-oriented, fair education and quality-oriented education, so as to achieve balanced development and improve the education quality.

The English curriculum objectives in this stage had the following characteristics: (1) The curriculum objectives of middle school English had been listed as a separate item in the curriculum standards. (2) The English curriculum objectives were mainly from the three dimensions: basic knowledge and basic skills, process and method, and affective attitude and values, which are conducive to the overall growth and development of students. (3) The English curriculum objectives were mainly composed of five elements: language knowledge; language abilities; culture consciousness; emotions and attitudes; and studying strategies. The five elements were directly aimed at cultivating students' comprehensive language skills.

3. Cause analysis for the Evolution of English Curriculum Objectives

The development of compulsory education English curriculum is mainly featured in: "From emphasizing basic knowledge and skills to emphasizing ability cultivation, from discipline-oriented to quality-oriented education, and from knowledge-centered to student-centered[2]." Educational activities are a synthesis of various historical factors. As the ultimate direction of education, the evolution of English educational goals also contains social, historical, cultural and other reasons.

3.1. Constant Transformation of Social Needs

After 1949, the national construction and development policy was to establish friendly relations of cooperation with the Soviet Union, so Russian became the most important foreign language and English education was almost completely suspended.

Since reform and opening-up in 1978, China had turned to the study of excellent science and technology from other countries, and English education was put in the first place in foreign language education. In the 1980s, the country introduced exam-oriented education and English was included in the college entrance examination. At the end of the 20th century, the new curriculum revolution was implemented, the national education policy gradually changed from exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education, emphasizing the cultivation of talents, and the English education changed from instrumentality to humanity.

Therefore, English educational aim should be connected with social needs and stick to the principle of human development. The humanistic nature of English curriculum, namely the cultivation of students' humanistic quality, is further strengthened based on the realistic social background. At the present stage, the meaning of English has already surpassed its instrumental connotation, and its deeper significance lies in the cognition and inheritance of the national culture on the basis of the instrumental nature. The English level of a country's citizens refers more to the level of their English humanistic literacy than to their English knowledge and skills.

3.2. Turn from Teaching to Education

The continuous evolution of the English curriculum objectives reveals the transformation of English teaching into English education. In the early years after new China, learning English was limited to the teaching of simple vocabulary and reading. With the continuous development of English discipline and the emphasis on humanities, English education no longer simply emphasizes knowledge and skills, but pays more attention to the cultivation of humanistic feelings. Discipline education is no longer just for the purpose of discipline development, the cultivation of human quality has become the focus of basic education.

The English Curriculum Standard for compulsory education in 2011 pointed out that through English learning students can develop comprehensive preliminary language application ability, and promote mental development and improve comprehensive humanistic quality[3]. In addition, the status of teachers is gradually valued, and teachers are more and more able to have the right to say in education. In this process, the pedagogic perspective represented by teachers became the center of foreign language education, and the English curriculum objective is transferred from English teaching to English education.

3.3. Need of Discipline Construction and Development

The evolution of English educational objectives is a reflection of the internal changes of English education. The construction and development of any discipline with vitality is a process of continuous scientific and practical application. The change of educational objectives reflects the process of self-renewal and self-adjustment within the discipline of foreign language education. In this self-adjustment process, there are both extrinsic causes like society, economy and the self-development factors of discipline itself. This kind of upward force propels the discipline to be able to continue to advance in the development of history, and can radiate full of vitality.

The original English education objective highlighted students' language using. Under the influence of external environment, the discipline itself is also seeking for the diversification of goals. Now, the English education objectives have been expanded to five dimensions. The coverage of the objectives is more extensive and the content of the objective is more detailed. These are the manifestations of the sustainable scientific progress of a subject.

4. Development Characteristics of Objectives

By reviewing the history and analyzing the characteristics of the English curriculum objectives in the stage of basic education in China, the author finds that the English curriculum objectives have three characteristics: Basic knowledge and basic skills always occupy the basic position; the requirement of cross-cultural consciousness is increasingly prominent; the attention from instrumentality to humanity. Based on the analysis of these three characteristics, it is found that the objective setting and implementation of English curriculum must deal with three factors and three pairs of relations: the three factors are subject, society and students; the three pairs of relations are language and culture, the instrumentality and humanity of English education, language knowledge and language application.

4.1. Adhere to Basic Knowledge and Skills

In 2011, the English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education proposed that students should master English language knowledge, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language forms used to express common topics and functions. Language application ability contains two levels of meaning, namely linguistic competence and linguistic pragmatics. Language competence emphasizes students ability to recognize and understand language, that is, the objectives of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating in English curriculum standards. Language pragmatics lays more emphasis on students' language using competence appropriately, that is, the communicative competence. Under the new course concept, language knowledge is the basis of comprehensive language application ability. The current English course revolution focuses on how to cultivate students comprehensive language ability.

Since 1949, reforms have taken place in the English curriculum objectives of compulsory education. The course objectives at each stage have a different focus on English basic knowledge and skills. (1) The goal of basic knowledge attaches great importance to phonetic, vocabulary and grammar, until the new century adds topic and function. (2) Basic skills prior to the 1980s, reading and translation skills were

valued. Since the 1980s, more emphasis had been placed on the training of reading and speaking. In the 21st century, the English curriculum equally highlights listening, speaking, reading and writing and the overall improvement of these abilities. (3) The language communicative competence has been valued since the 1990s. The new century English curriculum objectives train learners' comprehensive language application competence.

With English curriculum revolution, the content, form and expression of curriculum objectives has changed greatly. Basic knowledge and basic skills always hold a significant place in objectives. Although some aspects are often neglected in the implementation of English curriculum due to the limitations of the specific degree, the operational process and the realistic conditions, the fundamental status of English basic knowledge and skills is obvious. China's English curriculum objectives will go on emphasizing the basic knowledge and skills, which is the basis to develop students' comprehensive language application ability.

4.2. Prominent Requirements for Cross-cultural Awareness

In the early years after new China, Chinese English curriculum standards attached great importance to basic knowledge and basic ability. Up to the 1980s the English curriculum did not address cross-cultural awareness. In 1992, the English curriculum began to focus on improving the relationship between foreign language form and language meaning.

“The major role for English is to help speed up modernization, but the roles of language for culture and international contact are also mentioned [4].” In 1996 the syllabus was proposed to deal with the language teaching and cultures diversity, and it was believed that by knowing other countries' civilization, it would help students learn English well and broaden their horizons, so as to promote students to better understand the culture of their own nation. In 2000, The Nine-year Compulsory Syllabus directly proposed to understand cultural differences, enhance world awareness, and understand and respect the fine cultural traditions of other countries and nations. In the 21st century, the standard has redefined the nature and tasks of the English curriculum itself, requiring students to know the world and cultural differences in terms of cross-cultural awareness, so as to broaden their horizons.

Several amendments to the syllabus have required the cultivation of intercultural awareness[5], which focuses on the relationship between language and culture, and enhance the understanding of foreign cultures, especially the culture and social customs of English-speaking countries. With the process of curriculum reform, the role of cross-cultural awareness in English learning has become more and more prominent. English cross-cultural awareness needs to accept cultural differences and enhance world awareness through rational analysis. It requires students to experience the culture from the standpoint of the country of the language they are learning. Learners need to be capable of cultural empathy and culture integration. The cross-cultural awareness goal begins to focus on cultural phenomena, cultural patterns, cultural characteristics, and insight and critical understanding between different cultures.

4.3. Attention from Instrumentality to Humanity

After new China, English education emphasized its instrumentality. The objectives in 1951 and 1956 Standard were simply to emphasize the cultivation of reading, enabling students to read simple English texts or popular articles with the dictionaries help. This is the embodiment of using English as a tool. The objectives of the syllabus in 1978, 1982 and 1986 were to develop students' reading and self-study abilities, and to develop certain abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. The English curriculum objectives in this period were obviously instrumental. The aim of learning English was to promote language and cultural communication and meet various demands.

Since the 1990s, English education had begun to focus on the humanity. In 1992, 1993 and 1996, the syllabus proposed to educate students in the fields of ideology, morality, patriotism and socialism.

From the 21st century, China began the course revolution guided by the quality education thought. The syllabus stated that English curriculum standards were based on knowledge and technique, procedure and method, sensibility manner and value orientation. The standard proposed that the textbook should be selected and edited with a certain proportion of contents about Chinese culture, actively infiltrated the patriotism and socialist core values, and educated students about the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation, democracy and the legal system. The standard placed humanity in the same important position as the instrumentality, which showed that the English curriculum objective was the integration of instrumental value and humanistic value.

From the instrumentality to humanity, the development process of the English curriculum objectives in China is as follows: the emphasis on the instrumental value--with the instrumental value as the main value and the humanistic value as the auxiliary value--the instrumental value and the humanistic value are equally important. Besides imparting knowledge, the English course objective is to cultivate students comprehensive quality, which reflects students' developmental curriculum view and educational view.

5. Relevant Enlightenment

English course objective is the key point of English course reform, the embodiment of English curriculum values and the expectation of the implementation results. It restricts the selection of English curriculum content and is one of the criteria to judge the success of English teaching. The following pairs of relationships must be managed when compiling English curriculum objectives: (1) English discipline, learners and social needs. (2) Language and culture. (3) The instrumental and humanistic nature of English.

5.1. Relationship Between Discipline, Learners and Social Needs in English

Discipline, learner and society are the three factors that influence modern curriculum development. Discipline-centered theory explains the course from the discipline knowledge, it is easy to ignore the learner's physical and mental characteristics and social development needs. The learner-centered curriculum theory focuses on the role of students' hobbies and demands in course design, emphasizes the subjectivity of students, and tends to ignore the integrity and systematic of knowledge as well as social needs. The curriculum theory of social center requires that the curriculum construction should pay attention to the focal issues of the country and the society, and reflect the social, political and economic changes. It is easy to neglect the students' body and mind growth and the discipline itself features. Therefore, the English curriculum objectives should balance the relationship between English discipline, English learners and social needs.

In early days of the People's Republic of China, due social and diplomacy needs, Russian language developed rapidly, while the development of English education and students' needs were neglected. This emphasized the social value orientation of English curriculum objectives. As a result, Russian education was overdeveloped and English education was backward. After 1978, it was urgent to train English translation talents. The English curriculum objectives highlighted the cultivation of students' reading ability and translation ability, but ignored the students' needs and the characteristics of the discipline itself as a communicative language. Until the 1990s, under the influence of quality-oriented education and people foremost education, the English curriculum began to focus on the students' needs and advocate the students' all-round development.

The fundamental purpose of English curriculum is to teach students knowledge and skills, to improve ideological and moral level, to help them grow up healthily and to enable students to form comprehensive language application ability. Considering only one or two of the three factors (English discipline knowledge, learner development and social needs), such a value orientation cannot truly achieve the development of English education.

Therefore, it needs to properly balance the English discipline knowledge, social development needs and learners' overall development when it comes to English curriculum objectives. When designing the English curriculum objectives, it takes the country and society's needs as the starting point, takes the learners' comprehensive development as the foothold, selects the English discipline knowledge carefully, and forms an optimized English curriculum objective system.

5.2. Relationship Between English Language and English Culture

Language and culture are inseparable. It is impossible for learners to receive English education without receiving the cultural education of the English language. The English language itself has the function of carrying the cultural construction and marking social culture. The English curriculum objectives mainly lied on teachers' actual teaching. Teachers teach English lessons in the native language in which students are learning and developing[6], and adopt different teaching methods in their daily teaching (such as teaching cultural materials in class, carrying out class meeting activities for auxiliary teaching, adding optional courses, etc.) to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness as much as possible. Meanwhile, the English textbooks selection should be in lie with the English language's characteristics and increase the content about western culture.

The most important thing in balancing language and culture is to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness. "Mother tongue education is the people's cultural inheritance education, which fosters learners to be proficient in motherland language. Foreign language education is a process in which students understand, absorb and digest another culture while mastering another language[7]." English education is based on mother tongue education, which enables students to absorb foreign cultures, thus injecting new vitality into the development of national culture.

5.3. Relationship Between Humanity and Instrumentality in English

For a long time, the English curriculum objective attached importance to instrumentality and ignored humanity, students' psychological needs and values education. English curriculum objectives should follow students' emotional attitude and value orientation.

Enhancing students' humanistic qualities is the basic orientation of the new curriculum standards for the English course, and it is also an important reason why English is a compulsory subject[8]. The implementation of humanistic goals needs teachers, students and experts' collaboration. The key implementer is English teacher. English teachers should utilize all resources and favorable conditions to lead students to form a positive and practical learning attitude, and to fully stimulate students' studying desire, and to assist them to establish correct values and outlook on life.

English teaching material is the main content of teaching and a significant medium for teachers to carry out the education of emotions, attitudes and values. The choice of it should refer to students' life. English teaching materials should inspire learners strong studying desire, and then to build up learners' national self-esteem and self-confidence, and form a positive outlook on life and values. Some materials introducing Chinese culture can be selected from English textbooks. And patriotism, socialist core values, traditional virtues, and legal education can be infiltrated into teaching.

In a word, the establishment of English curriculum objectives must deal with the relationship between instrumentality and humanity so as to jointly promote the formation and development of students' comprehensive language ability. The humanistic goals' implementation requires the joint efforts of teachers, students and experts to truly promote the students' overall development.

6. Conclusions

Adamson concludes with the assertion that the history of Chinese English curriculum is the history of China itself [9]. In recent decades, the evolution of China English curriculum objectives is actually a process of constant adjustment and adaptation under the influence of various factors such as national politics, economy, diplomacy and society. Nowadays, English education is essential in quality education of China. Thus we need to make scientific and reasonable English curriculum objectives according to the requirements of social development for quality education. We should fully draw on the experience of the world language curriculum reform, actively adapt to the trend of the English education development in the 21st century, and strive to build an English curriculum objectives system with Chinese characteristics.

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