"Concepts and Strategies of Cultural Understanding Education": A Study Based on the Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Through the screening and analysis of literatures related to cultural understanding education in Chinese primary and middle schools throughout the China National Knowledge Internet (CNKI) database, we attempt to conduct an in-depth discussion as well as analysis in regard to following issues: Firstly, the current situation of cultural understanding education in Chinese primary and middle schools and the challenges they confront; Secondly, how can schools educate students in terms of cultural understanding cultivation; Last but not least, by what means can schools train their teachers to become more apt to cultural understanding education.

Keywords

Cultural understanding education; Educational practice in primary and middle schools; Cultural understanding teachers.

1. Introduction

Cultural understanding refers to people's process of the perception and understanding of culture, which has far-reaching significance for individual development and social harmony. As an essential source of national cohesion and creativity, the role of culture in the global competition of comprehensive national power is becoming more and more critical. At present, China is undergoing a profound economic and social transformation and reforms. As extremely frequent interchange of ideas and cultures happening worldwide, and social ideas becoming more and more active, young students are increasingly exposed to the complex influence of various ideas and cultural concepts.

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China states that, "Culture is the soul of country and of nation. A nation thrives when the culture thrives, and a nation strengthens when the culture strengthens", and that "we should dig deep into the ideas and concepts, humanistic spirit and moral norms embodied in the splendid Chinese traditional culture, then inherit and innovate according to the call of times, so that the everlasting charm and contemporary glamour of Chinese culture could be exhibited." The inheritance and promotion of the outstanding Chinese traditional culture calls for the enhancement of education. In January 2017, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing the

Traditional Fine Culture, which puts forward a higher requirement for the theoretical and practical research, as well as the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional fine culture education. Under such background, it is indispensable to strengthen the education of traditional fine culture, guide young students to build up national cultural self-confidence, and also to improve the cultural understanding eduation in schools.

Nowadays, the whole country attaches great significance to the teaching of traditional fine culture in primary and secondary schools, indicated by the development and optimization of the teaching staff and the constant lift of national funding. However, the current situation of cultural understanding education remains not too optimistic. On account of this reality need as well as policy tendency, we concentrate on the theme of "cultural understanding education", sort out existing research and conduct a systematic literature review, by examining the current situation of cultural understanding education in primary and secondary schools in China and the cultivation measures in schools, we aim to provide effective references for future cultural understanding education in primary and secondary schools, as well as to promote and perfect future cultural understanding education implementation in China.

2. Research Design

2.1. Research Questions

Based on the research theme of "current situation of cultural understanding education and relevant cultivation measures in primary and secondary schools in China", we aim to answer the following three questions by means of literature analysis:

1) What are the current situation of cultural understanding teaching in primary and secondary schools in China, and what challenges are they facing?

Nowadays, cultural understanding education already occupies a certain position in primary and secondary education, however, problems that require prompt solutions still exist in terms of teaching concepts and specific implementation;

2) How can schools educate their students on the level of cultural understanding?

How should schools carry out cultural understanding education in the aspect of educational concepts, educational goals and specific practices? By what means, and in what ways?

3) How can schools train their teachers to become more apt to cultural understanding education?

Generally speaking, teachers play a guiding role in concrete teaching activities. Only by promoting teachers' cultural literacy, can the cultivation of cultural understanding teachers in the new era, as well as the effective improvement of teaching quality of cultural understanding education in practice, become possible and realizable.

2.2. Research Methods

The research technique used is the Systematic Review Methodology. This method originated from the meta-analysis in the field of medicine, and has now become a broadly-used research method which enjoys wide acknowledgement in the domain of education on account of its scientificity. Compared with the method of traditional literature review, systematic literature review method has the advantages of standardized research procedures and repeatable research process in certain steps concerning data sources and literature screening criteria. On avoiding the possible error caused by the researcher's subjective selection of samples in traditional narrative review, its essence consists of a comprehensive research method with the function of knowledge-based innovation. It requires researchers, holding specific research goals, to formulate literature inclusion and exclusion criteria based on research questions, after which they use standardized techniques to extract and integrate data from selected literature materials, with the aim of obtaining answers to research questions or generating new theories

(Jinru YOU, Etc., 2017). In the field of education, the systematic literature review method consists mainly of the following six steps: planning, search of literature, evaluation of literature, extraction of data, integration of data, and finally, writing of the review (Fuquan HUANG, etc., 2017).

2.3. Selection and Coding of Research Samples

On limiting the scope of research within China, we use one of the largest thesis databases in China: China Knowledge Network (www.cnki.net) as the main data source. During the retrieval, we take "cultural understanding education" as the core keyword, and limit the document type to academic dissertation. To be specific, we first count and integrate all the literature on "cultural understanding education" from 2011 to 2020, after which screening is accomplished according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and ultimately, 15 documents remained. The specific screening conditions are as follows:

① Research methods: empirical study (such as experiments or investigations, examples in teaching should be included), covering quantitative methods, qualitative methods or mixed methods, etc.. Articles such as reviews, interviews, and theoretical discussions should be eliminated;

② Research scope: within China, in elementary and middle schools. Articles concerning foreign countries or higher education should be excluded;

③ Time period: between 2011 and 2020;

④ Subjects: secondary education, culture, elementary education, Chinese language and literature, education theory and education management, vocational education, etc.

During the analysis of various research samples, in order to obtain research findings and results in a more scientific and objective light, multiple participants in this study used the Nvivo software respectively to code the samples. We then continued to perform a consistency comparison analysis, after which the final results were obtained.

3. Study Results

3.1. Documents Make-up and Research Topics

3.1.1. Subject Make-up

Among the 15 dissertations, 14 have done relevant research on promoting cultural understanding associated with a specific subject, including four related to Chinese, six related to English, one related to music, and three related to art. We can see that the academia of cultural understanding education mainly pays attention to the cultural understanding training of language and arts' learning, among which language shares a higher foucus (coverage rate: 71.4%).

3.1.2. Phase of Studying

Of the 15 dissertations, 12 involved specific phases of studying. Six researched in senior high school, five in junior high school and one in primary school.

3.1.3. Core Themes

Among the 15 dissertations related to promoting cultural understanding education, the core themes are different. They are cultural understanding education (coverage: 5 dissertations), cultural understanding and inheritance (coverage: 3 dissertations), cultural awareness (coverage rate: 3 dissertations), cultural self-confidence (coverage: 1 dissertation), cultural understanding (coverage:1 dissertation) and cultural content (coverage: 1 dissertation).

3.2. The Research Method Adopted and Theoretical Basis Involved

3.2.1. The Research Methods Adopted

In 15 dissertations, a total of eight research methods are applied, including comprehensive induction method, questionnaire method, literature research method, experimental method, classroom observation method, interview method, comparative study method and case study method, in which there are 46 reference points in total. Literature research method, case study method and interview method are used more frequently, accounting for 12, 11 and 10 reference points respectively. In addition, questionnaire method is also used more, accounting for 6 reference points; The comparative study method and classroom observation method account for 3 and 2 reference points respectively, and the comprehensive induction method and experimental method account for 1 reference point each.

3.2.2. The Theory Involved

Six research theories are applied in the fifteen dissertations, including philosophical hermeneutics, cultural-historical theory of psychological development, cultural-educational school, metaphor theory in cognitive pedagogy, Piaget's constructivism, post-modernist view of art and educational view, involving eight reference points in total. Piaget's constructivism occupies three reference points, and the other five theories occupies one reference point each.

3.3. The Main Achievements of the Dissertations

3.3.1. The Main Problems Existing in Cultural Understanding Education in Primary and Secondary Schools

In the selected dissertations, a total of 8 dissertations studied the current situation of cultural understanding education in primary and secondary schools, involving Chinese, English and art. In the three dissertations related to the subject of Chinese, the problem that teachers are partial to improving students' examination-oriented skills rather than the cultivation of cultural literacy is reflected, and two dissertations reflect the problem of solidified classroom teaching mode. Moreover, the three dissertations discover repectively that the course evaluation mechanism is not perfect yet, the cultural teaching objectives are not clear, students are not interested in learning and they have a fear of difficulties. For example, Tao Haiyan (2019) found that one of the reasons for students' lack of interest in learning pre-Qin prose-a kind of classical Chinese-is the fear of learning difficulties.

Three of the four dissertations related to English mentioned likewise the problem that teachers focus too much on test-oriented knowledge teaching and neglect the cultivation of cultural literacy. Two dissertations address the issue of students engaged in passive instrumental learning. Tan Jing (2020) shows that 64.5% of the students in the investigated samples study passively for reasons of examination, future work and school arrangement. Only one article mentioned the problem of students' superficial understanding of culture.

In the article related to art, the author points out that the current teaching mode of cultural understanding in arts is simple, students' willingness to appreciate art is weak, teachers don't pay enough attention to art appreciation, and teachers' professional ability needs to be improved. For example, Huang Yuhuan (2019) found that influenced by the traditional exam-oriented education mode, the phenomenon of teachers lecturing and students passively listening still exists widely, which makes the supposedly interesting art appreciation class become a stage for teachers' solo performance and lose the most fundamental significance of art appreciation.

3.3.2. Strategies to Promote Cultural Understanding Education

Among the 15 dissertations, 14 put forward relevant strategies to promote cultural understanding education. The strategies mainly refer to two parts based on educational

elements, one for educators and another for educational influences. And they also associate with different subjects, including Chinese, English, art and music.

(1) Based on educational elements.

Eight dissertations put forward relevant strategies for educators (primarily teachers) to promote cultural understanding education. The most important thing is the timely promotion of teaching concepts (coverage rate: 87.5%). Researchers suggest that teachers change the traditional teaching method where teachers are the main body of teaching and students passively accept the knowledge. They should establish the leading role of teachers in communication and discussion and integrate the dissemination of cultural knowledge into teaching. Secondly, researchers agree that teachers should elevate their proficiency in culture (coverage rate: 62.5%). For example, Li Wenjing (2016) found that teachers, as essential educators, are the leading force in education and teaching, and their professionalism and teaching attitude determines the success or failure of education. Therefore, to help students understand the cultural content, teachers must first have a certain level of cultural accomplishment. In addition, the researchers also emphasized that teachers should have a deep understanding of teaching materials, have the ability of critical reflection, strengthen their professional quality, and enhance emotional communication with students. In contrast, researchers pay less attention to external dimensions, and only one article puts forward the strategy of innovating teacher training.

Eleven dissertations put forward relevant strategies to promote cultural understanding education through educational influence. Situational teaching (coverage rate: 54.5%) is the top concerned teaching strategy. Researchers believe that it is an effective means of improving students' personalities and laying a foundation for their cultural understanding. Besides situational teaching, comparative teaching (coverage rate: 45.5%) is also a frequently mentioned teaching strategy. Du Xin (2017) divided comparative teaching into two ways: horizontal and vertical comparison. The research found that comparative teaching is helpful to broaden students' thinking, understand cultural diversity, stimulate students' interest in learning and promote students' cultural understanding. In terms of teaching methods, researchers also put forward practical teaching, multimedia teaching, dialogue teaching and interdisciplinary teaching. It is worth noting that apart from focusing on teaching strategies, researchers also pay attention to the role of teaching evaluation in promoting cultural understanding. Yu Tong (2019) pointed out that if teachers consider the dimensions such as teaching objectives, emphasis, difficulty, and students' attainment while evaluating and designing their teaching aimed at cultural understanding, they will be more likely to find more learning activities that are useful in promoting students' understanding.

(2) Associate with subjects.

Thirteen dissertations put forward relevant strategies for the education of cultural understanding related to different subjects, including four related to Chinese teaching, five related to English teaching, three related to art teaching and one related to music. By contrast, the strategies put forward by researchers are not much different from those divided according to educational elements. However, two strategies are worth mentioning. Researchers have emphasized the strategy of group cooperation in English teaching, which shows that interpersonal communication is an effective way to promote cultural understanding in language learning; in art teaching, Yang Yufei (2020) proposed that interdisciplinary teaching can be implemented. It will be helpful to integrate the knowledge of arts and other subjects organically in helping students build their cognitive system and promote cultural understanding.

4. Research Discussion

4.1. Existing Problems in Current Cultural Understanding Education

1) Lack of interest and indifference in cultural inheritanceof primary and secondary school students. There exist not only modern literary works, but also ancient prose of pre-Qin philosophers. Nevertheless, according to the survey conducted by Tao Haiyan including 319 people in 2019, nearly 50% of the students didn't have much interest in learning the prose of pre-Qin scholars, 15.6% of them had no interest at all, and only less than half were actually interested in learning this kind of prose. In another survey concerning the study purpose of pre-Qin prose, only 64 people chose "by interest", and 116 students chose " for improving learning ability and mastering learning methods" and "promote humanity quality in classic works", accounting only for 36.4% of the total number. [1]

2) The over-emphasis on results rather than the process of teaching. From the perspective of cultural understanding, teachers tend to pay more attention to the final presentation of knowledge and skills, but ignore the culture and spirit contained therein. For example, most people know the Ode to Ancient Grassland Farewell by BAI Juyi, but how many people know about the related story of BAI's Living in Chang 'an? At that time, BAI Juyi lived in Chang 'an, when he was 11 years old, he went to the prime minister for advice with a business card ("Menzhuang" inTang Dynasty). When the prime minister saw the card with BAI's name on it (which literally means "living for free is easy"), he said with a smile, "Rice in Chang 'an is very expensive, but it is easy for you to live in Chang 'an for nothing." The prime minister continued to look down to see (under the name card there are usually their own poems showing their literary talent): Lush, lush grass on the plain, once every year it sears and grows. Wildfire can not burn it out, spring breeze blows it back to life. Distant scent invades the ancient path, sunny green joins the arid towns. Another send-off to our wanderlust son, sad, sad leave-taking exuberant. [19] After reading this, he clapped his hands and cried, "With such literary talent, it would definitely be easy to live in Chang 'an for nothing !" And This is the allusion to this famous ancient poem.

Through analysis above, we think that in order to make primary and secondary school students understand the charm of their own culture on the basis of learning knowledge and skills, stimulate their interest in cultural understanding, enhance their recognition of Chinese excellent culture as well as their cultural confidence, we should approach this problem in multiple aspects, "focus on the essence but not only the surface; emphasize on the inside, but not on the outside." [20]

4.2. The Role of Disciplines in Fostering Cultural Understanding

More specifically, during the teaching in primary and secondary schools, is it necessary to cultivate students' cultural understanding through minor subjects such as music and art other than the main subjects?

In recent years, the curriculum system and teaching mode of cultivating core competencies have gradually attracted the attention of scholars. According to the results of current research, studies relating to core competencies mainly involve teaching activities, curriculum construction, and the communication within disciplines. In an era where multiple cultures coexist, cultural education should not be limited to only cultural knowledge, but also to raise students' cultural awareness in order to achieve cultural understanding. It cannot be denied that with the historical development of times, modernization, or modernity has become the main feature of the society today, and accordingly, modern culture with its rational, objective, unified and universal characteristics has also become the mainstream cultural symbol in the process of modernization. In this context, the consequences in the field of education are also very obvious: the quality-oriented education of music and arts around the world has broken

away from the original cultural context and developed to an objective and value-neutral mode, and the problem of cultural identity recognition caused by the development of such dependency has also become increasingly prominent [7].

It is not difficult to observe, through the research among papers, that the theoretical basis of fostering cultural understanding through musical education lies in musical anthropology. Music teaching aimed at cultural understanding, which was proposed by American musical anthropologist Nettl, is the representative of these theories. Just as Nettl focused on, music education will inevitably show the diversity of world music, and the different forms and contents of music in various countries are all worth studying, and on the same time, show the necessity of cultural understanding. In regard to the cultivation of students' cultural understanding in arts, HU Zhifan (2003) pointed out: "During the process of teaching, students' understanding of national democracy and patriotism, as well as the recognition of local and traditional cultural should be strengthened. We can organize students to visit local museums to learn about the cultural relics left over from local history. In addition, conducting a field trip to some historic sites could help students to learn about the past; Furthermore, discussions could also be organized to encourage the exchange of ideas or measures concerning the protection and restoration of cultural relics." [17] The development and utilization of Li Jin (a kind of brocade) resources in Hainan is a typical example. Not only does Li Jin contain a lot of folk art contents, it also holds immeasurable cultural value as one of the World Intangible Cultural Heritage. Through the art education of Li Jin, students can have a deeper understanding of the significance of local cultural inheritance and also learn to better protect and inherit this intangible cultural heritage.

Based on discussions the above, we believe that it is indispensable to to cultivate students' cultural understanding through the construction of core competency courses that point to cultural understanding, such as music and arts.

5. Conclusion

Cultural confidence is a profound and enduring force in the development of a nation and its people. Cultural understanding education aims to foster students' sense of cultural identity, enhance their cultural confidence, and promote cross-cultural understanding in this diverse and globalized world. Being aware of the importance of education for cultural understanding, we write this article through a systematic literature review and coding the relevant literature samples. In this article, We take a realistic look at domestic teaching and learning in China from the perspective of concepts and strategies of education for cultural understanding, examine the current teaching situation in Chinese primary and secondary schools, and analyze teaching at the school level. The dissertations selected for this paper mainly focus on cultural understanding education, educational practices, and teachers who teach cultural understanding in primary and secondary schools in China. Using the systematic literature review method, we collect data covering multiple subjects and sections, which ensures the representation of the results.

This study has encountered difficulties in the research process, and there are limitations and shortcomings in the presentation of the research findings. Firstly, the research scope is limited to dissertations written in Chinese. Research results other than Chinese, books, periodicals and reports written in Chinese are not included, and there are few existing research dissertations on how to train the teachers to become more apt to cultural understanding education, which may affect the research's perfection. Secondly, there may be omissions when selecting search terms in this study, which leads to the lack of research samples. Third, this study only aims at domestic research in China, so the results and viewpoints are only applicable to the actual situation in China.

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