

PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

Study on the Implementation of Ideological and Political Education in Junior High School English Class

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ABSTRACT

Ideological and political education in curriculum is meant to develop students' ideological quality, political awareness, moral characteristics and humanistic quality through the teaching of school curriculum at schools of all levels. This exploratory study adopted the method of class observation to examine the implementation of ideological and political education in junior high school English class. Results show that the actual implementation of ideological and political education in English class is influenced by three factors: teaching contents, teaching experience, and exam-oriented education system. This study suggests that English teachers should strengthen their professional development to keep improving their teaching competence and attach importance to cultural education to develop students' cultural awareness and that schools should establish a feasible and scientific evaluation mechanism to create positive teaching and learning environments. It is hoped that these suggestions can be of help to effectively implement ideological and political education in junior high school English class.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As societies today are faced with serious moral decline, the task of moral education has become a matter of great urgency in many countries. People have realized that imparting moral and value education in schools should be considered as important as a subject in science or mathematics. On 8 December 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping of China stressed that ideological work in colleges should be integrated into the entire education process and ideological and political work must focus on students, caring for them, serving them, and helping them improve in ideological quality, political awareness, moral characteristics and humanistic quality to enable them to develop both ability and integrity. He also advocated that ideological and political education (IPE) in curriculum should be coupled with specific ideological and political courses to exert synergistic influence on students' all-round development [1].

Since then, IPE has received widespread attention at schools of all levels nationwide, including elementary schools and secondary schools.

Junior high school students are at the developmental stage of early adolescence, a pivotal period in their transition from childhood to adolescence. During these years, young adolescents gain important health and social knowledge and shape beliefs and attitudes, which lay the foundation for their adulthood [2]. Therefore, it is crucial for junior high schools to understand and respond to young adolescents' unique developmental characteristics when designing curriculum, giving instruction, making assessment and organizing school environment, with which China's advocacy of IPE in curriculum coincides precisely. As English is one of the most important subjects in junior high school in China, implementing IPE in English classes is central in that it contributes to students' all-round moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic grounding with a hard-working spirit.

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While Chinese education is now pressing for a great emphasis on IPE and much research has been done on IPE in English courses at colleges and universities, there is insufficient empirical inquiry into the issue of whether IPE is actually manifested in junior high school English class. In view of that, this study made a case study of a junior high school in China, aiming to investigate the actual implementation of IPE in English class and the influencing factors.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1. Research Subjects and Objects

The subjects of this study are six English teachers from a junior high school in Fuzhou of China. Teacher A and Teacher B are both from Grade 7. Teacher A, 26 years old, is a novice teacher without much experience in English teaching. Teacher B, 47 years old, has 23 years of teaching experience. As a senior teacher of the junior high school, she has been appointed as a municipal backbone teacher and academic leader, and has given many municipal-level lectures and open classes. She is also Head of English Teaching and Research Group of the school, and has supervised the young teachers in the group to give municipal-level demonstration classes and participate in teaching skills competitions for many times. Teacher C and Teacher D are both from Grade 8. Teacher C, 29 years old, has 4 years of teaching experience. She is a second-grade teacher of the junior high school who has given school-level demonstration classes many times. She has also participated in many municipal-level teaching skills competitions and once won the second prize in the school-level teaching skills competition. Teacher D, 33 years old, has been teaching for 7 years. She is a primary-grade teacher of the junior high school and has participated in many school-level teaching skills competitions. Teacher E and Teacher F are both from Grade 9. Teacher E, 28 years old, has 2 years of teaching experience. She is a primary-grade teacher of the junior high school and has given many school-level demonstration classes. Teacher F, 35 years old, has 12 years of teaching experience. She is also a primary-grade teacher and has given municipal-level open classes many times.

The following three texts are randomly chosen from the textbooks used in that junior high school as the research objects: Buy More and Save More (Section C, Topic 1, Unit 4 of Grade 7), The Little Match Girl (Section C, Topic 3, Unit 3 of Grade 8), and Review of Topic 3 (Unit 2 of Grade 9). Buy More and Save More is a reading lesson about making a shopping list and

doing shopping. The Little Match Girl is also a reading lesson, which introduces the story of a little match girl who freezes to death in the street on New Year's Eve. Review of Topic 3 is a review lesson on key phrases and sentence patterns learned in Topic 3 of Unit 2.

2.2. Research Questions

This study tried to answer the following questions:

1. Has IPE been actually implemented in junior high school English class?
2. What are the main factors that influence the implementation of IPE in junior high school English class?

2.3. Research Method

This study mainly adopted the method of class observation. The author observed two different classes in each grade which were taught the same topic by two teachers of the junior high school. During the observations, the author took notes and recorded the classes. Brief after-class interviews were also conducted with the teacher participants, which included their understanding of IPE in English classes and the difficulties they have encountered in the process. Then, the recordings of the class observations were transcribed to obtain the proportion of IPE in each class. Finally, a detailed analysis of the transcripts, class observation notes and interviews were made with an aim to answer the above-mentioned two research questions.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

3.1. Data Analysis

Altogether 12 research materials were collected, including six class recordings and six class notes. The duration of each recording is more or less 45 minutes, which is the length of a class in the junior high school. The slight difference could be explained by the teachers' different teaching pace. The unit of class time was converted into minutes for the convenience of analysis and comparison, and its length was accurate to two decimal places. After calculation, Teacher A's total class time is 44.08 minutes, Teacher B's 48.48 minutes, Teacher C's 46.10 minutes, Teacher D's 48.79 minutes, Teacher E's 45.27 minutes, and Teacher F's 48.08 minutes. Table 1 shows the frequency of IPE, the time spent on IPE and its percentage in each class, and other information collected in this study.

Research Object	Research Subject	Age (years)	Years of Teaching (years)	Total Class Time (minutes)	IPE Frequency (times)	IPE Duration (minutes)	Percentage of IPE (%)
<i>Buy More and Save More</i>	Teacher A	26	0.17	44.08	1	1.10	2.50
	Teacher B	47	23	48.48	3	5.07	10.46
<i>The Little Match Girl</i>	Teacher C	29	4	46.10	2	5.12	11.11
	Teacher D	33	7	48.79	1	2.97	6.09
<i>Review of Topic3</i>	Teacher E	28	2	45.27	3	15.51	34.26
	Teacher F	35	12	48.08	4	17.05	35.46

Table 1. The proportion of IPE in the English classes studied.

Table 1 shows that in Teacher A's teaching of Buy More and Save More, IPE was only conducted once in total, taking 1.10 minutes and accounting for 2.50% of the whole class length. She spent the time asking the students why they should make a shopping list and then came to the conclusion that making a shopping list can save time and it is important to be well-planned for to-do things. Teacher B added more IPE elements into her teaching and conducted IPE three times in total, which took 5.07 minutes and accounted for 10.46% of the whole class length. She first spent 2.10 minutes leading students to talk about the reasons for making a shopping list and introducing the IPE theme of "rational consumption", and then she spent another 2.13 minutes on the discussion of such hot topics of "nudity loan" and "campus loan" in recent years to instill a correct consumption concept in students and call on them to consume rationally. At the end of the class, she spent 0.84 minutes summarizing the IPE part of this topic to make it deeply rooted in students' mind.

When teaching *The Little Match Girl*, the teachers considered "empathy" as the IPE theme of this lesson. Teacher C carried out IPE twice in total, which took 5.12 minutes and accounted for 11.11% of the whole class length. She spent 3.20 minutes guiding students to discuss the behaviors and attitudes of the passers-by and making the students understand that it was the indifference of the passers-by and the ruthlessness of the reality that led to the death of the

girl. She then spent 1.92 minutes talking about such social issues as "to help or not to help" to cultivate students' empathy and love for others. Teacher D carried out IPE once by introducing the IPE theme orally by herself without motivating students to discuss it. The IPE part took 2.97 minutes and accounted for 6.09% of her class time.

When teaching *Review of Topic 3*, Teacher E conducted IPE three times in her teaching, spending 15.51 minutes, 34.26% of the whole class length. Her students first watched a video for 3.36 minutes about environmental pollution and world rain forests reduction in order to have a better idea of the urgency of environmental protection. Then they discussed how to protect environments in daily life for 10.24 minutes. After that the teacher spent 1.91 minutes explaining Ant Forest, an app of Alipay which is aimed to reduce carbon emissions. Finally, she concluded by calling on students to do what they can to save the earth. In her teaching, Teacher F conducted IPE four times, spending 17.05 minutes in total, 35.46% of the whole class length. She first asked her students to watch the video *Beautiful Fuzhou* for 2.07 minutes to arouse their love for their hometown. Then she spent 4.24 minutes guiding them to discuss how to protect the environments of parks. After that, she spent 5.11 minutes reviewing garbage classification knowledge. Finally, she spent 5.63 minutes instructing students to write a speech on school environment protection as an output exercise.

3.2. Research Findings

Based on the author's class observations, it has been found that IPE is actually being implemented in this junior high school's English classes and that such factors influence its implementation as teaching contents, teaching experience and exam-oriented education system.

3.2.1. Teaching Contents

Table 1 shows that teaching contents will greatly influence the implementation of IPE. It usually takes effort to integrate IPE into review lessons. But the IPE proportions in Review of Topic 3 are as high as 34.26% and 35.46%, significantly higher than the other two topics. Besides, Teacher E, with only 2 years of teaching experience, had an IPE proportion of 34.26%. while Teacher B, with 23 years of teaching experience, had only 10.46%. The different topics in their lessons can explain the big difference. In Review of Topic 3, the topic of "Protect the Environment" is a very good IPE element that teachers can integrate into their teaching without many difficulties. As part of IPE in class, Teacher E and Teacher F respectively introduced Ant Forest and garbage classification knowledge, which are very close to students' life and can enhance the effect of IPE. However, the IPE element in Buy More and Save More is comparatively implicit, which makes it challenging for teachers to implement IPE while teaching the language of English.

3.2.2. Teaching Experience

Table 1 also indicates that teaching experience has an impact on the implementation of IPE. Although Teacher A and Teacher B taught the same lesson, the proportions of IPE in their classes are respectively 2.50% and 10.46%. The main reason for such a difference is that Teacher A is not as experienced as Teacher B. Teacher A, 26 years old and a novice teacher, does not have much experience in English teaching while Teacher B, a senior teacher with 23 years of teaching experience, has given many municipal-level lectures and open classes. Her rich teaching experience enabled her to make better curriculum design even though the IPE element of that lesson is implicit. However, it should be noted from Table 1 that years of teaching is not equal to teaching experience. Teacher D is 33 years old and has been teaching for 7 years, while Teacher C is 29 years old and has been teaching for only 4 years. However, Teacher C's proportion of IPE reaches 11.11%, 5.02% more than Teacher D's. That is because Teacher C has actively participated in school-level and municipal-

level teaching competitions many times and has accumulated a lot of teaching experience. Teachers cannot accumulate teaching experience by simply repeating the same teaching routine year after year.

3.2.3. Exam-Oriented Education System

From the teachers' classes and their brief interviews, it has been found that exam-oriented education system has become an obstacle to the implementation of IPE in English class. Though China's education has undergone drastic reforms over the years, exam-oriented system is still prevalent in China. Under this system, education authorities evaluate schools and teachers only by students' exam scores, and schools and teachers evaluate students also only by their exam scores. As a result, both teachers and students are very concerned about getting high scores. English teachers pay too much attention to the teaching of English words and grammar and neglect the cultivation of students' other qualities such as their cultural awareness. On students' part, they attach too much importance to the learning of words, phrases and grammars but do not care much about cultural implications behind what they are learning. As IPE is not assessed in exams, it is even considered as a waste of time. Therefore, though most teachers agree that it is crucial to implement IPE in class, it is often difficult to do it due to the exam-oriented education system.

4. SUGGESTIONS

Based on above, the following three suggestions are proposed to strengthen the implementation of IPE in junior high school English class.

4.1. Attaching Importance to Cultural Education

Language and culture are intertwined. Each language has its own culture and each culture has its own languages, traditions, customs, behaviors, beliefs, and values. Students' cultural values will influence the quality of their life, their society, and even their nation. In China's New English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education, cultural awareness is stressed as one of the four core qualities that junior high school students should develop. According to the Standards, students should be able to understand different cultures, respect cultural diversity and differences, identify with Chinese culture and develop an international outlook [3]. Therefore, it is significant to regard cultural education as part of IPE and incorporate it into school curriculum design.

The study of English language is not limited to pronunciation, words or grammar. It also includes learning cultures. Students cannot learn English well without understanding the cultures in it. So English teachers should focus on the explanation of foreign cultures and their differences from Chinese culture. For example, when teaching the lesson of Buy More and Save More, teachers can introduce the consumption concepts of western people and make comparisons between them and Chinese people in this aspect. By so doing, students can not only have a better grasp of English language but also better understand Chinese and western cultures. For another example, when explaining such English words as were transliterated into Chinese, teachers can tell students that now some Chinese words like Hongbao and Hukou have been transliterated into English and included in the Oxford English Dictionary, which demonstrates the increase of China's national strength and international influence. Teachers can also provide various cultural experiences for students to better understand foreign cultures and feel more identified with their own culture. The development of students' cultural awareness will increase their cultural confidence and help them grow into global citizens with an international outlook.

4.2. Strengthening the Professional Development of Teachers

According to Neena Aneja, the future of a nation depends upon the type of teachers who shape the future generations, and every teacher plays the most important role in shaping the students as enlightened citizens [4]. As it is best to inculcate IPE in school curriculum, teachers' teaching competence plays a decisive role in the successful implementation of IPE in class. Teachers need to be intimately involved in designing content-rich and meaningful curriculum and instruction for their students. However, many teachers do not feel they have the competence to design such curriculum [5]. So it is necessary to strengthen teacher training, improve their teaching skill and promote their professional growth. Schools should provide teachers with more learning opportunities, update their notions of education and promote the application of new teaching approaches. For example, schools can invite experts to give lectures or run workshops about how to implement IPE, or start programs that can assist with the improvement of teachers' teaching competence. English teachers themselves should fully understand their responsibilities as educators and the importance

of implementing IPE in their English teaching and take the initiatives to raise their own IPE consciousness. They should engage in lifelong learning through continuing education to keep themselves informed of the current teaching pedagogy and innovate their own teaching in order to realize the inculcation of morals and values in diverse ways. It is also beneficial for them to observe excellent classes and actively participate in teaching skills competitions and workshops. In addition, English teachers should endeavor to improve their own ideological and political qualities. They should be aware that only by setting a good example can they help students establish positive ideals and values and become caring and responsible adults in the future.

4.3. Establishing a Feasible and Scientific Evaluation Mechanism

The goals of language teaching can be divided into external and internal goals. External goals relate to students' use of language outside classroom while internal goals relate to students' mental development as individuals and enable them to become better citizens [6]. The evaluation of the goals is an integral part of English curriculum. However, the exam-oriented education system cannot make scientific evaluation of teachers and students. In order to ensure the implementation of IPE in English class, it is necessary to further reform the exam-oriented education system and establish a feasible and scientific evaluation mechanism.

The evaluation of students should be directed more towards their overall development, and various formative assessment measures, rather than the only criterion of their exam scores, should be adopted throughout their English learning process. For example, not only written tests or spoken tests but also projects and class observation can be used to examine students' mastery of English skills and their participation, cooperation, presentation and other aspects about their quality development and morality. With regards to the evaluation of teachers, schools should stop evaluating them only based on students' exam scores. Instead, schools should take into account whether teachers integrate IPE into their teaching and reward those who have done so. Teachers' own morality should be also evaluated with their teaching performance. School administrations need to establish a feasible and scientific evaluation mechanism to provide institutional guarantee for the effective implementation of IPE in junior high school English teaching [7].

5. CONCLUSION

IPE in curriculum is not a specific course. It is a vital part of curriculum that deeply influences students' all-round development. This study found that IPE has been carried out in junior high school English teaching but to what extent it is integrated into class teaching varies due to such factors as teaching contents, teaching experience, and exam-oriented education system. To more effectively implement IPE in class, English teachers should attach importance to cultural education to develop students' cultural awareness and enhance their cultural confidence. They should also strengthen their professional development to keep improving their teaching competence. In addition, schools should make efforts to establish a feasible and scientific evaluation mechanism to create positive teaching and learning environments.

However, it should be noted that the results obtained from this study are not applicable in all cases, as this is only a small-scale study. The validity of the results will be affected by inadequacy of research subjects. Another limitation is that teacher participants might have consciously prepared for their teaching, which is difficult to control and will influence the objectivity of this study. While the authors acknowledge its limitations, it could be a starting point for future research. In the future, large-scale qualitative and quantitative studies can be done on implementation of IPE in English class on the teachers' part and also on the evaluation of IPE on the students' part.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Xiufeng Yuan was in charge of designing the study, drafting and revising the manuscript. Qi Lu was responsible for data collection and analysis. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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