On the Impact of English and American Literature Teaching on Moral Education in Colleges and Universities

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Abstract. English and American literature courses play a significant role in cultivating students' cultural awareness and aesthetic taste, which are the indispensable part of moral education in universities. Hence, in the English and American literature courses, attention should be paid to the writing techniques of the distinguished writers as well as the spiritual connotation of these literary works. In practice, a variety of teaching methods should be adopted so as to cultivate the students' ideological and moral quality and humanistic spirit.

1. Introduction

With the social and economic development and the continuous political reform, China’s higher education demonstrates diversified characteristics, such as emphasizing academics, practicing democracy and advocating initiatives.

English and American literature courses, aiming at improving students’ humanistic quality, focus on the cultivation of students’ cognitive competence and innovative and practical ability. These courses can improve the students’ pragmatic skills, professional qualities as well as contribute to formation of the students’ healthy personality. Therefore, universities should attach great importance to the positive impact of English and American literature courses on cultivating students’ moral quality, and regard the establishment of proper political orientation as the top priority, which will subsequently enrich the students’ humanity knowledge and pave the way for the students’ comprehensive development.

2. The Theoretical Foundation and Rich Connotation of Moral Education in Universities

Throughout the history of Chinese education, ranging from “no shooting of the sleeping birds” in Confucius’ time to “all-round development of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labour education” in modern educational system, top priority has always been given to “morality”.

Generally speaking, moral education reflects the sociality and class nature of the educational system, meanwhile it is also an essential part of school education, closely connected and coordinated with intellectual and physical education.

All aspects of higher education rely on some theory for guidance, and moral education is no exception. The word “morality”, proposed by Hsun Tzu, connotes both social moral principles and individual moral qualities. The nature of morality determines morality is a type of ideology, a special form of coordinating and regulating system, as well as a kind of practical spirit.

Hsun Tzu’s moral and humanistic theory, Confucius “benevolent” code of conduct as well as Cognitive Development in the west all exert great influence on Chinese moral education and based on these ideas, a grand theoretical system, compromising the philosophy, psychology and practical strategy of moral development, has been constructed, providing valuable experience and guiding principle for effective moral education.

Concerning the content and way of moral education, both Chinese and foreign universities share one common character-strengthening moral education, enhancing students’ moral standards and establishing values, beliefs and ethical ideology which conform to the social development.

In the higher educational system, moral education has ample connotation, which is not confined to the teaching of the vocabulary in the textbook, but rather denotes providing guidance for
behavioral model, including the students’ civic consciousness and sense of responsibility, and ultimately endows students with excellent moral qualities and cultivates them into qualified citizens.

The moral education in Chinese universities has the following aims: to make the students be patriotic, support the leadership and basic line of the Party and be dedicated to the socialism with Chinese characteristics; to establish the scientific worldview and methodology and take the path of combining practice and theory; to be devoted to serving the people with the spirit of arduous struggle and strong sense of mission and responsibility; to observe laws and regulations of their own free will and have good moral character and healthy psychological quality; to be industrious, adventurous and strive for the mastery of modern scientific and cultural knowledge. From the aims, it can be seen that besides educating students into professionals, colleges and universities should pay more attention to cultivating them into “good people” with decent moral character and proper behavior.

3. The Positive Impact of English and American Literature Courses on Moral Education

Literature is a precious resource and literary works contain the comprehension and reflection of human living conditions. Literature does not only exhibit the richness of human mentality, but also questions the very existence of human life, reflecting a country or a nation’s pursuit for truth, goodness and beauty.

Although the teachers require the students to read the original literary works, the English majors tend to read some “abbreviated versions” and “excerpts”, or prefer to watch the films adapted from the famous literary works.

In addition to the educational function, English and American courses, demonstrating the authors’ pondering on social issues and human lives, contribute to the students’ English proficiency, cultural accomplishment and aesthetic taste. Owing to their irreplaceable function in enhancing the students’ cross-cultural awareness and appreciative ability, the magnificent role of English and American courses are widely accepted in the educational circle, gradually making them the essential courses in cultivating qualified English personnel.

Firstly, the reading and appreciating of the literary works can improve the students’ listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating ability, and equip them with the basic communication tools. Besides, by learning about literature, the students can acquire a wide range of knowledge, including philosophy, history, religion, music and arts, and they can also get insight into the foreign cultural customs, habitual behaviour, ideological system and value orientation, which is the key step of humanistic education in colleges and universities.

Secondly, the characters and their life experiences in the literary works tend to have great impact on the students’ choice of life path and give them enlightenment on their attitude towards life. Effectively integrated with English and American movies, western aesthetics, religion, customs and etiquette, the English and American literature courses, will broaden the students’ scope of knowledge, especially the humanistic knowledge and let the students have a better perception of life, national dignity and social responsibility.

Thirdly, the reading and appreciation of the English and American literary classics will help the students establish the correct value orientation, lofty character and healthy psychology. As the outstanding representatives of the world literature, English and American literary works furnish the future generations with abundant creation experience, making great contribution to the whole literary world. Correct outlook and lofty character are intricately connected with the students’ humanistic knowledge and thinking way. The excellent humanistic ideas and moral values contained in the English and American works will help the students distinguish right from wrong, evil from good and false from true, and strengthen their ability to recognize and solve problems, consequently cultivating their correct value orientation and lofty character.

On the one hand, the reading and appreciation of the English and American literary classics will increase the accumulation of humanistic knowledge. The representative works in English and
American literature are actually the image description of the specific social phenomenon in the British and American culture at that time. Through education of British and American literature, students can have a more perceptual and in-depth understanding of the times corresponding to the corresponding works. For example, by studying Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Oliver Twist*, students can have a profound understanding of the cultural environment in Britain in the early period of the bourgeois revolution and the real psychological conditions of people at that time. Mark Twain's *Gold Rush Age* is a true representation of the golden age of American capitalism. In the process of learning these works, students can greatly increase their understanding of the corresponding historical background and humanistic geography, so as to increase their accumulation of humanistic knowledge of the society involved in the corresponding works. And this accumulation is the foundation and premise of cultivating university students' humanistic quality.

On the other hand, it helps college students to respect and tolerate other people's humanism. In the process of learning the corresponding English and American literary works, students must bring themselves into the scenes involved by the corresponding protagonists to have a deep understanding of the corresponding works. And what the college students learn is the classic works of British and American literature, which all have strong humanistic spirit connotation. In the process of learning, college students can understand the value of caring for, respecting and forgiving others, advocating peace, and paying attention to equality and freedom in the process of communicating with others through the different destinies of different characters. For example, Shakespeare's classic work *The Merchant of Venice*, through showing people the greed, cruelty and coldness of the merchant of Venice, makes the readers have extreme disgust for it, and then makes it get the tragic ending of great happiness on this basis, and makes people believe the existence of the social law of evil and bad retribution. College students by means of the British and American literature classical learning, can on the one hand, consciously form the humanism spirit of compassion compassion for others, on the other hand before trying to overcome their own cold, snobbish personal center socialist, allowing it to treat people on the basis of equality to establish a good interpersonal relationship, lays the foundation for the smooth development.

Lastly, It is helpful to cultivate college students ’spirit of struggling and persevering. The English and American culture has become one of the mainstream culture in the world. In the classic works of British and American literature, we can often see the heroic characters who rise to the challenge and overcome difficulties in the face of adversity, and finally overcome all difficulties by their own perseverance and perseverance. For example, in *The Old man and The Sea*, the famous American writer Ernest Hemingway created an old man who can be destroyed but cannot be defeated. Jack London, the American writer who made the great proletarian revolutionist Lenin forever in his mind, described in the call of the wild in the extreme arctic, the story of buck, the hound, growing up step by step in the cruel reality. Under the influence of the English and American literature, when encountering difficulties in study and life, college students will inevitably will compare themselves with the leading role the analogy, thus develop their spirit of perseverance for the future work and finally create a good mental condition for the ideal.

4. The Main Measures of Moral Education Through English and American Literature Courses

Higher education stage is the key period for the students’ forming of their outlook on world, life and value, therefore, the teaching of English and American courses should regard cultivating students’ moral quality and creative thinking as the main purpose, which demands the students to learn the distinct creation techniques as well as explore the spiritual connotation of the literary works. The teachers should strive to enhance the students’ ideological and ethical standards though multiple teaching modes and methods.

First of all, the students’ independent thinking and self-learning ability should be cultivated during the learning process, which are the essential qualities for the students. So the teacher-centered “cramming” teaching method should be converted into the student-oriented method, bringing the students’ initiative into full play. During the teaching process, the students
should be encouraged to think independently, to be imaginative and to make complicated analysis on their own. The teachers should inspire the students to see through the surface phenomena and grasp the theme underlining the plot of the story.

In order to cultivate the students’ ability of critical thinking, teachers should encourage the students to raise questions from multiple angles and express their different opinions. While the literary works are being analyzed, the fate of the characters should be combined with the social background, and the students should be engaged in the discussion and try to discover the characters’ success and failure and the causes that lead to the tragic fate of certain characters. The students have to distinguish the personal causes and social causes, and then transfer the characters into the real life circumstances and be in their shoes. Through this empathy experience and subtle influence, it will drive home to the students what is the correct value orientation, hence, helping them establish the correct outlook on life and on moral issues.

Besides letting the students grasp the theme and the humanistic ideas implied in the English and American literary works, the teachers should also make them realize which ideas are in line with our national conditions, and which ideas are not. This requires the students to comprehend the essence of the western culture as well as to recognize what kind of humanistic ideas are needed for our country’s prosperity and rejuvenation.

Next, the second class should be established, so as to promote the students self-learning ability. The modes of the second class should be diversified, such as after-class reading of the classics, the sharing and reciting of one’s favorite poems and essays as well as the rendition of the classic episodes. By breaking through the on-class limit, the students’ linguistic and comprehensive ability will be substantially improved.

In addition, a diversified and competency-based assessment system should be constructed. In the past, the major drawback in the examination of the English and American literature course is to lay too much emphasis on the result but not on the process, which will not produce the reliable feedback and scientific assessment. In order to construct an effective assessment system, curricular and extra-curricular evaluation should be combined, and the students should be encouraged to do the textual analysis of the literary works, which will cultivate the students’ ability of linguistic application and aesthetic appreciation.

Lastly, comparative literature teaching methods should be adopted appropriately. In fact, both English and American literature education can play a lot of roles, such as to increase the accumulation of humanistic knowledge, treat others with tolerance and respect, treat yourself to strive up etc.. But there is a big difference in the emphasis and description. Under such circumstances, when teaching British and American literature, it is necessary to compare the elements similar to those in traditional Chinese literary works, so that students can combine their different historical backgrounds and cultural environments, and fully understand the advantages and disadvantages of the two and their different focuses. Therefore, on the basis of two-phase verification, it further proves the correctness of various excellent humanistic spirits recognized by the mainstream human civilization, makes college students attach great importance to the cultivation of related humanistic quality in the process of receiving education, and further improves the cultivation effect of education on students’ humanistic quality in English and American literature in universities.

To sum up, university’s moral education is a long-term and systematic task, which demands the joint effort of school, teacher and student. With the continuous improvement of the teaching methods and the educational system, it can be expected that English and American literature courses will play a more significant role in university’s moral education, which will sure to enter a stage.

References

