

Moral Education in English Language Teaching in Mainland China: A Discourse Analysis of English Textbooks in Senior Schools and People's Attitudes Towards Integrating Moral Disciplines into English Language Education

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Abstract: Moral education and English language teaching in China have deserved extensive attention. Therefore, this essay tries to have a glimpse of moral education in the senior school English textbooks by conducting a discourse analysis with the addition of carrying out a questionnaire to investigate people's attitudes toward moral education in English language teaching. The results show that the majority of respondents agree with combining moral values with language teaching despite the concerns and uncertainty of the small minority. The discourse analysis suggests that moral issues such as devotion and sacrifice are highlighted in textbooks.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; Moral education; English textbook; Attitudes.

1. Introduction

Moral education, as Nucci(1987) noted, can be considered teaching basic values and principles including honesty and fairness which foster learners' understanding of social and personal responsibility. Currently, English, commonly believed to be the lingua franca, has drawn attention from researchers and scholars, especially in fields such as TEFL and TESOL. With the rise of moral education, these two issues, therefore, inevitably encounter each other.

In China, the popularity of English language learning has dramatically increased as in this country English has been considered a compulsory subject in various levels of schools since the early 1980s. Liu(2021) noted that despite improving high school students' language proficiency, thinking quality, cultural character, and learning ability are also highlighted in High School English Curriculum Standard(2017 Edition). Therefore, senior school students should be given more attention as they are required reach an advanced English level. Another thing is that the period that teenagers experience is crucial in terms of their social value cultivation. Therefore, the purpose of the essay attempts to give a glimpse on moral education in English teaching in Mainland China by conducting a discourse analysis of English textbooks in senior schools. Also, more and more people in China learn English as a second language. Consequently, it poses a necessity to investigate how people perceive infusing moral education into English teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Moral Education

Moral education has been investigated by scholars. Wright(2012b) studied how moral education in English elementary schools had been viewed and implemented by teachers in schools. Currently, English language teaching has become prevalent to lead to the discussion on integration of moral education and teaching. Amini et al. (2020) interviewed eight Iranian EFL teachers and concluded that their exposure to moral dilemmas in disciplinary and educational fields should be highlighted. Concerning China, Feng(2019) studied the social values and their ontogenetic development in English textbooks in Hong Kong, Nevertheless, although

these researches have focused on various aspects of moral education relating to English language teaching, the moral values in English textbooks in mainland China have deserved limited focus. Meanwhile, people's attitude in mainland China has also been less investigated. Given this, the current study aims to bridge this gap, providing an alternative way to examine these issues.

2.2 Discourse analysis

Commonly, discourse analysis, is a technique that has been used in many fields. Despite discourse analysis has been deployed in multiple fields, education has witnessed the prominence of discourse analysis. Rogers et al. (2005) noted that Critical Discourse Analysis has been increasingly used by educational researchers to investigate the connection between language and society. Moreover, Nielson and Nørreklit(2009) suggested three levels of analysis to illustrate the relationship between denotations and connotations of words and texts. Since English textbooks involve various types of discourse, therefore, discourse analysis will be suitable to see how vocabulary in these textbooks indicates wider concepts relevant to social contexts.

3. Methodology

Concerning the English textbooks in senior schools, discourse analysis will be deployed to examine the content in these textbooks. In this essay, discourse analysis is featured by an educational context where words in sentences will be analyzed with the addition of their connotations to see how they attempt to educate or influence students' understanding of social values.

English textbooks published by People's Education Press are selected for discourse analysis. Currently, it is common to notice that PEP's English textbooks have widely been deployed in senior classrooms. As a consequence, English textbooks originating from PEP are suitable for analysis. Given this, textbooks including compulsory 3 will be the target materials for processing.

To investigate people's attitudes, an online survey is conducted by a questionnaire that consists of 6 questions including 4 closed questions and 2 open questions. As for question 5, a Likert scale is used to examine to what extent the participants disagree or agree with infusing moral disciplines into language teaching. Concerning questions 4 and question 6, the answers to these two questions will be dealt with by a qualitative analysis.

4. Results

4.1 General description

During the survey, 27 participants participated in the questionnaire. Concerning question 5, 20 participants agree with integrating moral disciplines into English language education whereas 7 participants choose a neutral stance. Moving to question 4, one can generally tell that participants' responses are mainly correlated with "social norm", "restrain" and "moral norm". Meanwhile, by using similar methods on question 6, the answers from participants presented similar outcomes.

4.2 A detailed analysis on the results of open questions.

As for open questions in the survey, all the responses to question 4 can be generalized as a type of restrain that regulates people's behavior and help them distinguish what is right and wrong. This can be seen from the answer of Participant 14, who says,

"Moral discipline refers to a set of ethical principles or moral values including a strong sense of personal integrity that guides my personal development.

Moving to question 6, responses from these participants suggested the significance of integrating moral disciplines into English language teaching. Specifically, participant 1 believed that,

"Moral disciplines can foster teaching quality to educate students"

In addition, the participants also noted various ways to use moral disciplines in classroom. This can be seen from the answer provided by Participant 14 which noted,

"The integration of moral disciplines into English language teaching can be done by using texts and materials that promote moral values,

Nevertheless, some participants stated their concerns on teaching moral disciplines in the classroom. To illustrate, Participant 14 clearly expressed the potential risks that moral education may result in,

"Teachers facing challenges in selecting appropriate materials and activities that align with the diverse moral and ethical values of their students."

4.3 Results of the discourse analysis: An overall view

Generally examining the target textbook, one can tell that compulsory three directly focuses moral-relating topics such as virtues. Due to the purpose of the current study is to carry out a discourse analysis on moral issues in English textbooks, detailed analysis on this section will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.4 Analysis on texts in compulsory 3

In terms of morals and virtues, the preface of this unit is introduced by a quote from William Wordsworth, “The best portion of a good man’s life is his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.”

It is noted that “portion” contains an alternative connotation that refers to a part of the responsibility that is shared with other people. Meanwhile, words such as “nameless” and “unremembered” both emphasized personal sacrifice. Nevertheless, when it comes to the listening and speaking section in this unit, students are challenged by moral dilemmas presented by graphics. These dilemmas are presented to reveal students’ embarrassing situations of making moral choices. Moving to reading section, a story about doctor Lin Qiaozhi is selected. At the beginning of the passage, she said,

“If they entrust me with that life, how could I refuse that trust, saying I am cold, hungry, or tired?”

The word “entrust” refers to a type of expectation that one has on other people. Meanwhile, words including “cold”, “hungry” and “tired” both indicate physical illness and her perseverance which requires her to devote herself to other people.

Personal sacrifice can also be witnessed from Bethune. In his story, vocabulary such as “despite difficult situation” and “assist Chinese people” demonstrate the willingness to provide pessary aids to people who suffer, thus invisibly encouraging students to do the same thing.

5. Discussion

From the survey, it is generalized that even though negative trends and concerns about moral disciplines can be witnessed, the majority of participants still believed in the necessity of infusing moral disciplines into English language teaching. Meanwhile, participants also suggested applicable approaches to integrate moral values into English language teaching. Moving to the discourse analysis, it proposes that moral values in senior English textbooks mainly concentrate on issues including devotion and sacrifice that lead to a better life and society. This belief, therefore, strongly encourages students to devote themselves to the sake of the great. In general, the textbook aim to remind students of helping others and transform students into that type of citizens.

6. Conclusion

This essay mainly focuses on the senior English textbooks in Mainland China by carrying out a discourse analysis with the addition of conducting a questionnaire that investigates how people perceive infusing moral education into English language teaching. More researches are expected to be conducted in relevant fields.

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