

Article

Innovative Course Reform for Teaching “Introduction to Analects”

Yachen Li

College of Literature and Media, Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing 526061, China; edenli666@gmail.com; Tel.: +86-1356-092-7813

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Abstract: Teaching a course “The Introduction to the Analects” is based on the “Analects of Confucius” to explore and discuss the relationship between traditional Chinese education (Guoxue) and modern analects. In the course, the theory and basic framework of Confucian thought are taught. The essential content of the Analects is selected according to five themes of “Moral Cultivation”, “Education”, “Filial Piety”, “Benevolence and Virtue”, and “Governance”. Through discussion with students and speculative and practical teaching methods, educational strategies are formulated for students by incorporating allusions and fables and conducting discussions and reflections. Guidance to students is provided for them to integrate what they have learned into their daily lives. Detailed exploration is conducted from two aspects: “teaching methodology” and “teaching process”. In this research, the teaching materials and methods of the “Introduction to the Analects” were developed to provide students with correct guidance on moral concepts to reflect the lessons from the “Analects of Confucius” on themselves and find answers to life and behavior. Then, the challenges and difficulties faced by the decline of moral education in today’s society can be addressed by integrating traditional Confucian thinking into current moral education and implementing the “Application of Tongjing”.

Keywords: General Education, Analects of Confucius, Confucius, Application of Tongjing

1. Introduction

Modern higher education is not only to train professionals or experts in certain fields but also to cultivate student’s independent thinking, discrimination, analysis, and judgment. In modern education, students' morality must also be nurtured by broadening their horizons and minds and establishing new values and orders while also acquiring knowledge. In higher education, holistic methods are adopted to foster the development of both knowledge and morality (Lin, 2001). Confucianism has been the spiritual essence of traditional Chinese culture. Confucius advocated cultivating virtue through the integration of moral principles and a practical spirit (Wu, 1984) and promoted traditional Chinese cultural education (Tang, 1997). Therefore, integrating Confucian morality and spirit into higher education has become an important issue.

As current higher education focuses mainly on preparing students for their careers, Confucianism and related courses have not been sufficiently taught. There are no standardized textbooks or teaching materials, and the courses lack a theoretical foundation. Due to the scarcity of in-depth research on related topics, there is a superficial understanding of Confucian knowledge. Even when students learn it, they struggle to apply what they have learned to their daily lives. This has led to ineffective course design and teaching, indicating a need for improvement. Therefore, this research aims to provide students with correct guidance on moral concepts, thereby enabling them to reflect the lessons on themselves and find answers to life and behavior by developing teaching materials and methods to teach the "Introduction to the Analects". The developed materials and methods effectively address the challenges and difficulties posed by the decline of moral education by integrating traditional Confucian thinking into modern moral education. Educating classics such as the Analects of Confucius also leads to the successful application of Tongjing.

2. Course Materials

It is essential to explore the theory of the original classic, “The Analects of Confucius”, to understand its basic philosophy and avoid deviating from its original lessons. Based on the essence of the Analects, teaching materials must be selected and arranged according to Confucian thoughts. By interpreting the theories within the Analects, teaching materials must be developed for college students. Therefore, rigorous and precise interpretation and classification of the meanings of “The Analects of Confucius” are essential. The content must be rearranged following Confucian ethical and philosophical ideas. Instructions for students must be given in five themes: "Moral Cultivation," "Education," "Filial Piety," "Benevolence and Virtue," and "Governance." By employing the teaching material, students can understand the essence of the Analects better and integrate the lessons from individual chapters effectively.

2.1. Moral Cultivation

Students need to understand morality and practice it to fully control their bodies and minds. Confucius' morality and attitude originate internally and are manifested externally. Therefore, self-reflection and practice must be emphasized to establish sound interpersonal relationships with others.

2.2. Education

Students must understand the meaning of Confucian "learning methods" to comprehend the correct mindset to possess and enjoy learning. Simultaneously, the significance of Confucius' advocacies of "teaching without discrimination" and "teaching students according to their aptitudes" needs to be stressed to foster a positive learning attitude.

2.3. Filial Piety

Filial piety must be explained well to understand the practical Confucian methods. Filial piety goes beyond respect and pertaining behavior and emphasizes reverence and love. Students must realize that "filial piety" is the foundation of Confucianism in terms of benevolence and fundamental morality.

2.4. Benevolence and Virtue

Becoming the virtuous gentleman envisioned by Confucius is important for students. Confucius emphasized seeking to establish themselves and others and achieve themselves and others (Yang, 2009). Confucius' teachings must be delivered to teach students how to behave as gentlemen, emphasizing the importance of a benevolent heart. A gentleman has a philosophy of "unrighteous wealth and rank are to me but floating clouds (Yang, 2009). Confucius referred to morality as the spiritual essence of "benevolence" which comprises moral requirements of "filial piety," "loyalty," "trustworthiness," and "forgiveness." Such morality shapes a person into a qualified individual.

2.5. Governance

The significance of Confucius' advocacy of "rectifying names" must be emphasized in education and the proper use of able and virtuous people. By understanding the meaning of "rectifying names", people fulfill duties and roles as the gentleman who behave consistently with their words.

3. Teaching Methods and Process

3.1. Methods

3.1.1. Utilizing Stories and Fables Effectively

Teaching materials need to be selected or designed based on the ideology of "The Analects of Confucius". Topics must be rearranged to overcome the limitations of teaching individual chapters separately. Digital textbooks are necessary to observe students' reactions and learning effects effectively. Stories and fables enhance students' curiosity and thirst for knowledge for improved learning outcomes with less effort.

3.1.2. Examples

Examples of behavior, role models, and templates must be provided for correct learning. In designing and selecting teaching methods, stories can be used to resonate with students and stimulate further discussion. Classroom discussions and reflections help students internalize the lessons and enhance their learning experiences. At the same time, feedback and suggestions from students can be used to summarize the lessons and improve their learning outcomes.

3.1.3. Discussion and Reflection

Students need to be encouraged to actively dialogue, communicate, debate, or conduct group activities. Through discussion and based on the lecturer's guidance, students can reflect on moral values, internalize the lessons, and seek answers to life's challenges. By doing so, students can cultivate their thoughts and embrace others' viewpoints, influencing their future actions.

3.1.4. Practice

After imparting knowledge and having discussions and reflections, students need to practice what they have learned. Through practice, they feedback to each other on the results of their reflections. Long-term learning is internalized through habit, thereby achieving a virtuous cycle of practicing Confucian virtues in daily life (Zhao, 2015). Doing so addresses the challenges and difficulties faced by students in today's society. By analyzing Confucius' thoughts, reasonable solutions can be found. By integrating traditional thoughts into modern higher education, and Confucian moral education, the "Application of Tongjing" is realized.

3.2. Teaching Process

3.2.1. Text-based Teaching

The original texts of the "Analects of Confucius" need to be taught based on their original content and chapters. Considering the five theories, appropriate explanations and content interpretation need to be taught along with in-depth subtleties and ideological connotations. Through easy-to-understand explanations, students can understand the original ideology of the "Analects of Confucius"

3.2.2. Guided Reading

Appropriate chapters from the "Analects of Confucius" can be assigned to students for group reading to interpret the original text independently and cultivate their presentation skills. Through the process of understanding and arguing, students can develop their autonomous learning abilities and understand the connotations of traditional Confucian culture.

3.2.3. Group Discussions

In text-based teaching and guided reading, related topics are introduced to students. Then, students can perform group discussions. Through guided teaching, students develop their abilities of independent thinking. In the process of identifying and solving problems, their ability to be aware of issues is enhanced. Through group discussions, students can understand the moral principles and spirits embodied in the "Analects of Confucius" in traditional Chinese learning.

3.2.4. Self-practice

With the awareness of issues, students can self-practice and apply the ideology to their daily lives. This fosters moral education and encourages students to adopt a correct attitude and values for humanity literacy. Through such reflection, students can further improve their morality and integrate traditional ideology with contemporary education. Finally, students come to understand that the "Analects of Confucius" is important and closely related to modern life.

4. Conclusions

Teaching the "Analects of Confucius" addresses the current problems in Chinese cultural education as it encourages students to explore problems and solutions. Based on an understanding of Confucius and his core ideas, the essence and the true meaning of traditional cultural education can be understood, ultimately yielding desirable learning outcomes. Through an "innovation in developing course materials, the ideology of the "Analects of Confucius" is examined. The original order of chapters and passages needs to be rearranged based on their content and significance. Textbooks need to be chosen in five main topics of "Moral Cultivation," "Education," "Filial piety," "Benevolence and virtue," and "Governance" for a comprehensive exploration of the key ideas of Confucianism. Through an "innovation in teaching methods", teaching methods suited for students must be developed by incorporating stories into the curriculum. After interpreting the original texts, discussions and reflections must be carried out to provide correct guidance and encourage students to apply what they have learned to their daily lives. To teach how to think based on the learned lessons, stories and fables need to be effectively used and examples of personal behaviors must be shown. In practicing moral education, discussions, reflections, and self-practice are important along with text-based teaching and guided reading. Finally, through an "innovation in research", traditional Chinese philosophical and cultural thinking can be integrated into present Chinese cultural education. The theories of the "Analects of Confucius" enable an in-depth yet accessible interpretation and integration to develop appropriate course materials and teaching methods. It is important to transmit Confucius's thoughts and spirit from the perspective of "applying ancient wisdom to modern life" and integrating "traditional cultural ideas" into "today's traditional Chinese culture education". With such an integrated education using traditional and modern methods, Chinese classics can be taught effectively for the "Application of Tongjing" in which traditional culture is integrated into modern higher education.

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