

## English Teachers' Value Education Reform in China's Rural Junior High Schools

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### Abstract

Poverty relief through education in China's rural area calls for value education. Restricted by the present old-fashioned education concept of local people and low English level of students in rural junior high schools, English teachers are lack of motivation to take value education reform, and thus value education is in great sufficiency. Local education administrators should create conditions to encourage English teachers in rural middle schools to undertake value education reform, while the English teachers should increase their understanding of education, curriculum standard and professional development, in order to develop their teaching skills of value education.

**Key words:** educational reform; value education; rural junior high school

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## INTRODUCTION

The fundamental question of education is whom to educate, how to educate, and for whom to educate. The fundamental task of education is to cultivate moral character. Based on the fundamental task of cultivating moral character, "value education" has gradually gained attention in the academic community, becoming a major direction in current educational reforms. The construction of value education initially focuses on the teaching practices in undergraduate universities in China. However, it has now started to trend towards the integration of value education into curricula at primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools. In China, "Related theoretical exploration and practical research have gradually extended from universities to primary and secondary schools." [1](p3) The primary and secondary school stages are crucial periods for the formation of students' personal value concepts. Implementing curriculum-based value education reforms and enhancing teachers' abilities in curriculum-based value education at the primary and secondary school levels have profound significance.

In 2020, China achieved a significant victory in eradicating absolute poverty in rural areas, marking a monumental success in the battle against poverty. On the occasion of the centenary of the

Communist Party of China, the party and the nation have put forward the strategic layout of promoting rural revitalization by carrying forward the spirit of poverty alleviation. The rural revitalization strategy necessitates the support of talent, particularly individuals willing to cultivate a deep connection with rural areas. In the realm of rural education, the focus lies on students hailing from rural backgrounds, who constitute vital forces for the future revitalization of rural areas. The teaching capability of English teachers in rural areas, specifically in integrating value education into the curriculum, holds a special value for enhancing the quality of the rural population and constructing a modern countryside. Implementing curriculum and ideological education reform in English classrooms at rural primary and secondary schools is a fusion of "supporting knowledge" and "supporting aspirations." This approach will help solidify the achievements of poverty alleviation and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. The incorporation of value education into the curriculum is not limited to theoretical courses. It encompasses various subjects, enabling students to deepen their understanding of political theory knowledge in practical contexts while studying professional knowledge and engaging in professional practices. This approach

facilitates students in flexibly applying political theory knowledge in real-life environments, strengthening the integration between disciplines, and emphasizing the importance of value-guided education. These aspects fall within the realm of implicit education. [2](p30) The teaching of value education in the curriculum can facilitate a transformation in the English classroom at primary and secondary schools, shifting from instrumental rationality to value rationality. This approach balances language skill development with cultivating students' ideals and self-awareness, nurturing their lofty aspirations. "Comprehensively advancing value education in the curriculum means integrating value guidance into knowledge impartation and skill development, aiding students in shaping a correct worldview, outlook on life, and values. This is not only the inherent meaning of talent cultivation but also an essential component." [3] Based on the background of consolidating the achievements of poverty alleviation and rural revitalization, the author organized a specialized teaching and research team composed of English major teacher trainees. They delved into teaching practices and conducted on-site research on the current teaching situation in primary and secondary schools in certain rural areas of Shangqiu city. They also directly observed some classroom teaching practices to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current status and effectiveness of education in empowering rural revitalization. The team discussed and analyzed the ideological and political teaching ability of English teachers in primary and secondary schools in rural areas, as well as the integration of "intelligence support" and "inspiration support" in classroom teaching.

### 1. The Current Situation of Value Education in English Class in Rural Junior High Schools

With the deepening of value education curriculum construction, the teaching ability related to value education (referred to as "curriculum ideological education" hereafter) has gradually become an important professional competence for primary and secondary school English teachers. The "Professional Development Standards and Guidance for Primary and Secondary School Teachers (English)" developed by Beijing Normal University points out that an outstanding primary and secondary school English teacher should "proactively incorporate ideological and moral education in appropriate, diverse, and effective ways based on the characteristics of the subject, content, and students' reality, enabling students to actively form their ideologies and values" [4](p22) Curriculum ideological education is a fundamental professional competence that primary and secondary school English teachers must master, and it plays a crucial supportive role in enhancing the quality of classroom teaching, aiming to better cultivate capable and aspiring socialist builders and successors.

Although the development of curriculum ideological education competence is crucial for the professional growth of primary and secondary school English teachers, the current situation is not ideal, particularly in some rural areas. For various reasons, some English teachers in primary and secondary schools still prioritize

knowledge transmission and skill development over shaping values. The research and visits conducted by our project team have found that English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools in Henan Province have long maintained a relatively low level of competence in curriculum ideological education. Their personal professional development lacks both external and internal motivation, leading to a reluctance or unwillingness to engage in curriculum ideological education. The "nurturing aspirations" teaching approach in classroom practices is limited and ineffective. This is primarily reflected in outdated value education concepts held by students' parents and school educational management departments, a lack of willingness among English teachers to integrate value education, and weak foundational English subject knowledge among students.

#### 1.1. The Outdated Educational Philosophy of Integrating Family and School Value Education

In rural areas, due to the overall low education level of students' parents, their understanding of the essence of education is somewhat outdated. Most parents do not comprehend the fundamental task of education, which is to cultivate morality and shape individuals. Instead, they generally view schools as places for imparting knowledge and believe that an English teacher's role is solely to teach English. They emphasize students' academic performance, prioritizing exam grades over the abstract and unquantifiable aspects of moral and character development. If an English teacher attempts to guide students in values and nurture their aspirations, some parents may consider this teacher as neglecting their primary duty and not focusing on teaching English effectively.

The school administrators, aiming to cater to the demands of parents, have adopted a performance-driven approach in teaching management and assessment, with students' grades as the primary focus. Unfortunately, this approach does not delve deeply into the fundamental task of moral and character development in education. In rural areas, parents of students in primary and secondary schools usually only pay attention to their children's academic performance and prospects for further education. This has led the school's educational management departments to prioritize students' academic achievements in teaching assessment, neglecting the non-quantifiable "morality and character" educational content. Consequently, the motivation for rural area English teachers to enhance their individual moral and character education capabilities diminishes, leading to a lack of effort in attempting value education in English classrooms. In some cases, the "morality and character" educational content is glossed over or treated superficially.

#### 1.2. The Lack of Enthusiasm of the Teachers for Ideological and Political Teaching

With the rapid development of the economy in rural areas of China, the affluent population is more inclined to send their children to urban areas for better education. The English proficiency of students in urban primary and secondary schools is increasing, leading to better school performance and higher teacher remuneration. This trend has attracted numerous outstanding teachers from rural areas to move to urban areas to teach. After

years of development, the English teachers remaining in rural primary and secondary schools are either older individuals who are not willing to move to the cities to teach or young teachers who view rural schools as a stepping stone and plan to eventually transition to urban teaching.

The older English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools lack the motivation for personal development and show a lack of enthusiasm for reforms in value education. Due to their extensive teaching experience, they have developed relatively fixed teaching patterns and philosophies, leading to a certain degree of professional fatigue. They struggle to keep up with the evolving educational policies of the Party and the country, lack the willingness to initiate teaching reforms and adhere to traditional teaching methods. Even the teaching content remains unchanged for many years, failing to keep pace with the times.

The young English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools also show limited enthusiasm for reforms in value education. Firstly, they lack internal motivation. Rural primary and secondary schools do not appeal to young English teachers, with temporary contract teachers waiting for their service periods to end and other young teachers actively preparing for recruitment, ready to leave rural schools at any time. They lack a firm belief in grassroots education and lack the ability to conduct value education. Consequently, they lose the internal motivation for curriculum and ideological reform. Secondly, external conditions are lacking. Rural primary and secondary schools lack a scientific teaching evaluation mechanism and often overlook the evaluation of ideological and political teaching abilities of English teachers. This failure to evaluate effectively hinders young teachers from engaging in curriculum and ideological reforms. Additionally, the senior English teachers in rural schools have inadequate abilities in value education, making it difficult for them to mentor and effectively assist young teachers in enhancing their ideological and political teaching abilities and conducting “aspiration support” education. As a result, the ideological and political teaching abilities of rural primary and secondary school English teachers progress slowly due to the lack of external conditions.

### 1.3. The Weak Foundation of the Students in the Subject of English

Rural primary and secondary school students in China typically have weaker foundations in the English subject compared to their urban counterparts. Moreover, the lack of a conducive environment for extracurricular English learning in rural areas makes it difficult to ensure a relatively consistent and stable extracurricular English study time. This results in significant pressure on English classroom teaching, with limited integration of value education into the curriculum and, when attempted, achieving very limited effectiveness.

Firstly, there is limited time for value education in the curriculum. Due to the weak English foundation and the general lack of conditions for students to engage in independent English reading and learning outside the classroom, English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools need to utilize classroom teaching time to help students improve their English proficiency. Within the

limited classroom time, English teachers must devote a significant amount of time to teaching subject-specific knowledge and skills, leaving insufficient time for value education.

Secondly, value education lacks a solid foundation. The weak subject foundation increases the difficulty of achieving teaching objectives in English classrooms in rural primary and secondary schools, hindering the smooth implementation of value education reform. Value education should be conducted on the basis of subject teaching, silently instilling values and beliefs while facilitating value education. This approach combines educational poverty alleviation with both intellectual and motivational support. However, the English subject proficiency of rural students limits the implementation of value education in the classroom. The student’s language abilities cannot support in-depth and systematic value education within the curriculum, significantly constraining the integration of value education into the curriculum. If value education is conducted without focusing on language teaching, the priorities would be misplaced. It may even lead to students developing a rebellious attitude towards learning, achieving the opposite effect by not effectively fostering motivation and aspiration.

## 2. Strategies for Enhancing the Value Education Teaching Ability of English Teachers in Rural Junior High Schools

To address the issue of inadequate ideological and political teaching abilities among English teachers in primary and secondary schools in rural areas, it is essential to fully mobilize both external and internal motivations for these teachers to engage in value education within the curriculum. Education administrative authorities should create conditions to encourage English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools to conduct ideological and political teaching. As English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools, it is important to focus on enhancing personal awareness of education, curriculum standards, and professional development, proactively improving ideological and political teaching capabilities.

### 2.1. Administrative Governing Department :

#### 2.1.1. Reforming the Teaching Evaluation Mechanism

In rural areas, the teaching evaluation of primary and secondary schools should reflect the fundamental educational task of fostering moral character and nurturing students. The administrative authorities of schools and relevant personnel should reform the evaluation mechanism to include assessment criteria related to ideological and moral education in the curriculum. This reform aims to guide English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools to innovate and experiment with incorporating ideological and moral education into their teaching. It encourages subject teachers to integrate “intellectual nurturing” teaching with the regular curriculum, aiming to enhance the teaching capacity for ideological and moral education within the context of English instruction.

### 2.1.2. Supporting the Development of Rural Teachers

The county-level administrative authorities aim to support the development of teachers in rural areas through policy measures, further implementing preferential policies such as the recruitment of specialized teachers, to attract excellent English teachers to rural regions. By infusing fresh talent and leveraging the “leader-goose effect,” we seek to drive reforms in moral and political education within the English curriculum at the primary and secondary schools of a school and an entire region. Creating an environment conducive to curricular and moral education reform through the construction of an effective external incentive will motivate English teachers in rural areas to engage in curriculum and moral education reform, thereby enhancing their abilities in this aspect of teaching.

### 2.1.3. Creating an English Learning Environment

The education administrative authorities can support or fund the construction of English corners and English reading rooms in primary and middle schools in rural areas, providing more opportunities for rural students to be exposed to English during their free time. This initiative encourages students to engage in self-directed English learning, alleviating the in-class teaching pressure on English teachers in rural areas and allowing for increased teaching time for integrating value education into the English curriculum.

Rural primary and middle schools should actively improve the teaching environment by setting up facilities such as English learning bulletin boards and incorporating standardized English signage within the school campus. By cultivating an educational atmosphere conducive to learning English, students’ interest in extracurricular English study and their proficiency in the language can be enhanced. This will contribute to a positive learning environment, supporting the reform of value education within the curriculum.

### 2.1.4. Developing Cooperation with Local Normal Universities

Collaborating with local normal universities is necessary and beneficial. The proposal for curriculum ideology and political education is based on reflections on the current state of higher education. In response to this, the Ministry of Education has specifically issued the “Guidelines for Curriculum Ideology and Political Education Construction in Higher Education Institutions” to guide the curriculum ideology and political education construction in universities. With the support of national policies, a group of outstanding curriculum ideology and political education teachers have emerged in universities. They have established curriculum ideology and political education teaching and research centers at various levels and developed exemplary curriculum ideology and political education courses, accumulating valuable experiences in curriculum ideology and political education construction. This experience can be shared to aid in the curriculum ideology and political education construction in primary and secondary schools in rural areas.

At the same time, collaborating with local normal universities is feasible. Local normal universities also have a need to serve local

basic education. Strengthening cooperation with local basic education can effectively enhance the quality of teacher training in local normal universities and better align with the needs of local basic education. Teachers in normal universities can gain a better understanding of the skills required by local basic education for teacher trainees, and the trainees can obtain more opportunities for internships and practical experiences, improving their teaching skills.

## 2.2. English Teachers

### 2.2.1 Consciousness of Educating

In rural areas, English teachers in primary and secondary schools should also cultivate the awareness of fostering moral character and nurturing students. They need to fully recognize the role of “nurturing aspirations” education in students’ future growth and success, placing the cultivation of moral character and nurturing individuals at the forefront of teaching work. While not neglecting the teaching of the English subject, timely and appropriately integrating value education is essential to develop well-rounded individuals in terms of morality, intellect, physique, aesthetics, and labor. It is important to emphasize the integration of value shaping with knowledge imparting and skill development, rather than simply focusing on subject knowledge and skill cultivation.

### 2.2.2 Curriculum Awareness

Rural primary and secondary school English teachers should study and carefully interpret the curriculum standards to enhance their awareness of the curriculum objectives. The 2011 version of the English subject curriculum standards defines the nature of the curriculum as follows: “The English education curriculum at the compulsory education stage has a dual nature of instrumentality and humanity.” [5](p3) In terms of instrumentality, the English curriculum is tasked with cultivating students’ basic English literacy and developing their thinking abilities. This means that students, through the English curriculum, acquire fundamental knowledge of the English language, develop essential English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and begin to form the ability to communicate with others in English. Furthermore, it further promotes the development of thinking abilities, laying the foundation for future continued English learning and using English to study other relevant scientific and cultural knowledge. In terms of humanity, the English curriculum is responsible for enhancing students’ overall humanistic literacy. This means that through the English curriculum, students broaden their horizons, enrich life experiences, develop cross-cultural awareness, strengthen patriotism, foster innovative capabilities, cultivate good character, and form correct life and value perspectives. In the “grading standards” in the “Curriculum Standards (2011 version),” “cultural awareness” is an important component. Therefore, “understanding and comprehending the target language (English) culture is beneficial for deepening the understanding of one’s own culture, fostering patriotism, and improving humanistic literacy; imparting cultural knowledge, cultivating cultural awareness and global awareness is an important task for teachers in English teaching.” [6](p66) Teaching ideological and political content in the curriculum is a requirement of the curriculum standards and an intrinsic need of subject teaching. Rural primary and secondary



school English teachers should establish a curriculum awareness and carry out ideological and political teaching in accordance with the curriculum standards.

### 2.2.3 Consciousness of Development

In rural areas, primary and secondary school teachers should cultivate a sense of personal development and proactively align their individual career development with the needs of the country. They should consciously develop themselves in various aspects such as personal professional knowledge, specialized skills, and teaching aspirations. Actively learning about the country's education policies, responding to national calls, constantly reforming teaching methods, and enhancing individual teaching abilities to nurture qualified, morally and intellectually capable socialist builders and successors for the nation.

Driven by the intrinsic motivation of personal development awareness, a competent primary and secondary school English teacher will consciously enhance their value education teaching abilities. They will explore value education in English classrooms, respond to the nation's call, implement national educational policies, and cultivate rural students capable of shouldering the responsibilities of rural revitalization. This is how education empowers the nation's rural revitalization strategy.

### 3. Conclusion

Education is an important means to consolidate the achievements in poverty alleviation and realize rural revitalization. The curriculum and ideological teaching ability of teachers can better cultivate ambitious goals in rural students and nurture the backbone of rural revitalization. Curriculum and ideological teaching is an important path to fulfill the fundamental task of cultivating moral character and promoting all-round development in education. It involves educating all staff members, throughout the entire process, and in all aspects, and it embodies the requirement for interdisciplinary education. Additionally, it forms the fundamental professional competence of English teachers. Faced with the weak willingness and inadequate ability of English teachers in primary and secondary schools in rural areas to carry out curriculum and ideological teaching, educational administrative authorities should strengthen the external motivation for English teachers' reform through reforms. Simultaneously, English

teachers in rural primary and secondary schools need to recognize the importance of curriculum and ideological teaching, enhance their awareness of nurturing and curriculum standards, and development consciousness. They should integrate students' characteristics and consciously attempt curriculum and ideological teaching in English classrooms, continuously enhancing their personal ability in curriculum and ideological teaching.

This study has certain limitations due to objective conditions. Currently, there is a lack of a unified scale for curriculum and ideological teaching. The analysis of the current situation of curriculum and ideological teaching by teachers in rural primary and secondary schools in this study is based on questionnaire surveys and interviews, thus carrying a degree of subjectivity. In future research, it will be essential to further explore the construction of evaluation indicators and scales for curriculum and ideological teaching in middle school English classrooms.

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