

Western and Eastern Educational Philosophies

AMINUDDIN HASSAN, NUR SYUHADA JAMALUDIN, TAJULARIPIN SULAIMAN AND ROSELAN BAKI

Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract

The idea and the notion of philosophy of education has been derived traditionally and modernly, became combined and simultaneously work on each other, in order to produce the supreme culture of education to the humanity. Discussing on this discipline, there are numerous aspects that are not parallel with each other, whenever comparing these aspect within the understanding of education itself, through the countries apart of this global nation. Thus, this paper attempts to perceive the approaches and the values in two gigantic educational philosophies, which are education system from the West and East. The culture and tradition of the society itself had shaped in development of both philosophies, revealed how far these disciplines are contrast to each other. This paper will look on the comparison between Western and Eastern Education Philosophies from the aspect of students involvement within classroom activity, the technique of teaching and learning process, the expression of learning process, the capability of students for both philosophies, the encouragement for the students, and the relationship between the teachers and the students. This paper also will look on the appraisal towards Western and Eastern Philosophies, and at last will look on the educational system of Malaysia from the views of Western and Eastern Educational Philosophies, along with the implication and suggestion through the practice of both philosophies.

Introduction

Most questions about education will lead one, sooner or later, to ask about the nature of education and whether there are certain aims that are somehow inherent in its nature or for some reason necessary or desirable. This makes questions and theories about the nature and aims of education a good place to begin in learning to think philosophically about education, though they are also a good place to end. Wherever one starts, one will be drawn back to them in attempting to address other educational questions in a deep and systematic way. (Curren, 2007, pp 7)

Education is the living knowledge, information and skills during the course of life, whilst education system is a platform which had been standardized and used as a reference by teachers to teach their students in communicative, informative and insightful way. In fact, education system acts as an indicator, which monitors the teaching to carry out within a policy that operates to fulfill the specific goal, which is to achieve and enable students to perform at an expected level within a specific span of time. Thus, the efficiency of educational system becomes the focus in the national development, as education turn to be the catalysis for eternal progress in order to produce the valuable and visionary individual.

In appreciating the natures and issues of education, one should acknowledge and consider the combination of academic roots in order to construct the best medium of knowledge. The philosophy of education itself can be divided on several major disciplines such as the Western and Eastern education philosophies.

The Comparison between Western and Eastern Education Philosophies

It could not be denied that different places have their own different culture and background of the societies. Generally, Western philosophy of education comprises two schools, which are traditional and modern. It has its roots in Athens, Rome and Judeo-Christianity, whereas Eastern philosophy is derived from Islam, Confucianism, Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism. This, is fundamentally influence the system of life, and certainly creates their education system. By looking on Eastern and Western countries, both countries have distinct differences in their ways of developing and shaping an individual, in terms of skills and attitudes. Thus, different cultures will have different philosophies, which results in different ways of doing things, especially in educating the next generation.

The Student Involvement within Classroom Activity

Comparing both schools of thought, it can be concluded that Westerners stress on active learning on their learners, whereas the Easterners prefer passive learning. Westerners, since the ancient Greek, Western philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato and Socrates encouraged rational thinking. Differently, the Eastern normally obtained the knowledge directly from their teachings of religion, such as Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Taoism (Chia Mun Onn, 2009). This is more of a one-way transmission of knowledge, wherever the belief prepared them with rules and regulations within their life.

Students of the Western education philosophy appear as active learners in the classroom, as the teaching and learning process not focusing on teacher-centered, but more on are active learners in the classroom. It encourages the students to be active in giving and sharing the ideas, which is maximizing their role as a students than the teacher in creating the effective learning and teaching activity (Joyce Lin, 2008). For instance, they are very much encouraged to think and voice their views whenever they are involved in group discussion or carried out the given assignment. The students are then required to present it to the entire class. This enables them to participate not only during class time, but also to help them to be actively involved in the learning process even out of the classroom.

Apart from that, the students are also has been given an opportunity to express their ability and talent by analyzing and solve problems on their own. This is through the effort by the teachers in assigning them beforehand, to do research on their own, regarding certain topics that will be discussed in the following lesson. By doing this, every student is given a chance to learn to search for relevant information. In fact, according to Thornton (1995), the problem solving process becomes one of the basis on children for their critical mental development. Thus, it can be said that education development in the West including thinking skill, problem solving and communication skill which has been integrated well in the western philosophy itself.

On the other hand, the teaching and learning process through Eastern education philosophy stresses on the major outcomes from the teachers. It means that, teachers are fully responsible on

the class effectiveness, by preparing and planning all the activities for their students. For instance, the students are not trained or required to do anything, but every materials are given by the teachers. Usually, they are not required to carry out any research on the topics that are going to be discussed in the next lesson, but only responsible to receive input from their teachers. Besides, students are not trained or encouraged to voice out their own views and perspectives. In certain cases, students are not allowed to even respond to the questions posed by the teacher as the questions are in a way meant only for teachers to answer rhetorical questions (Joyce Lin, 2008). According to Rohaty (1999), one of the reasons why the teachers are hardly implementing various innovative teaching strategies is due to the excessive attention on theory rather than in practical sense (Rohaty, 1999).

The Ways of Teaching Process

From the view of Western education philosophy, the roles of students are recognized, by giving them the rights and respects within the teaching and learning process itself. They have the freedom and rights to take charge of their own learning, as they are given the opportunity and freedom to manage their own learning process. Therefore, the teachers play their role as a facilitator than the knowledge producer to their students. Teachers are responsible to help and guide the students in their learning process rather than teaching them what to do. In this way, students are given the opportunity to take control of their own learning process.

Furthermore, schools of the Western education also support and encourage students in self-management and in controlling their own learning process. This is where teachers come in to lead and guide the students by giving them guidelines in managing their learning process. In the classroom, children share more responsibility in their leaning process and evaluation and assessment is conducted to see their capability and also how they will apply into it (Teel et al., 2001). Teachers of the Western education do play a role in guiding students to discover and develop their abilities and potentials.

Compared to the Western education, Eastern education philosophy holds on to the concept of teaching. Students receive fully knowledge from the teachers inside the classroom. Students in a way receive knowledge in a rigid way as they only seem to learn and study straightly from the teachers. Thus, it is no doubt that a good teacher need to be very hardworking in delivering ideas, teaching and maintaining good relationship with their children (Gurney 2007).

The Expression of Learning Process

People in the West believe that the best education is mean to form the society to become a cultural nation in regard of their education and education aim, where the children will be open minded and tend to give ideas (Kruger, et. al, 1990). They will critically evaluate rather than just memorizing. Thus, in the Western education philosophy, students learn by understanding. They do not memorize what they have learnt but rather understand what they are learning. This gives the students opportunities to understand the topic that they are learning in a deeper way. In addition, they also have more time to have group discussions with their fellow classmates and also to do some research on the topic assigned. The lifeless textbook is replaced whenever they are trained to take notes directly when the teachers are teaching. Thus, students could pay attention to the teachers and eventually lead them to understand what has been taught.

Nevertheless, in Eastern education the students practice the concept of memorizing, as this philosophy focuses mainly on book learning and memorization within the teaching and learning process (Joyce Lin, 2008). The system of education is exam oriented, and teachers have to rush through the textbooks to prepare students to sit for the tests. As a result, students tend to memorize the facts in the textbooks rather than understanding it due to time constraint. In addition, the Eastern community has the concept that scores and certificates represent the ability (Joyce Lin, 2008). Thus, it will create a healthy competition among the students and great effort that have been made by them as they struggle to understand and gain the knowledge in order to obtain the good score in their examination.

Capability of Students for Both Philosophies

Western education encourages individualism and creativity towards the practitioner. Since students are given freedom to express their creativity, they are not afraid to be different or make mistakes, as the Western education looks at students' mistakes positively and the way to learn.

Differently from Western education, Eastern education philosophy emphasizes on conformity and originality. Students have tons of school rules to follow and such rules' main aim is to produce perfect students. Eastern education still prefers the absorption of good manners and moral support to the children in order to make the children get used to any rules especially in schools, and it is a teachers' responsibility to show their example on this (Dahlin & Regmi, 2000):

Encouragement for Students

Western education philosophy believes that providing compliments to students is important in encouraging them to excel in education. For instance, compliments are especially given when students score well in their examinations. However, even when the students did not do so well in their studies, compliments will also be given to them as an encouragement for them to work even harder in future. The Western education believes that by providing such encouragement to the students, they will not give up easily and will continue to put extra effort in their education.

On the other hand, the Eastern education philosophy is stricter, as students will be criticized whenever they fail to achieve the expected results in their examination. Criticizing is given to the students because the Eastern education believes that criticizing serves as a motivator to the students to work hard and avoid students from being arrogant and lazy. According to Abdullah Sani (2001), criticizing can lower down students' motivation, unless they turn the criticism into the information for self-improvement, and also becoming more vital and brave to face even to various types of negative admonitions.

Relationship between Teachers and Students

A research conducted in Tajikistan shows that Muslim children prefer teachers from the West compared to local teachers as they are more friendly, caring, more knowledgeable and always assisting children to succeed (Niyozov and Pluim (2009). Niyozov and Pluim added that they are all even willing to share the Muslim children's problem. It is because the Western education philosophy believes that student-teacher relationship is more open and the students are more willing to talk to their teachers. It is known that a teacher in a Western school does a good job of assessing their effectiveness in teaching (Garcia, 2000).

In Eastern culture, the teacher-student relationship is a position of trust in which the teacher is in a position of authority and the student is in the position of being obligated to comply with the legal directives of the adult (Chory & McCroskey, 1999). Teachers are meant to be respected and sometimes students even have to bear with teachers' bad temper. In fact, teachers do act as a big boss who does not talk with the workers (students) directly most of the time. This is contrast with several research and attitude that should be demonstrated by teacher as some researchers such Chory & McCroskey suggest that teachers need to have more initiative to communicate with children, to increase the delegation of decisions to children and to be in the class more frequent.

The Appraisal towards Western and Eastern Education Philosophies

Education system in the East and West is difference due to their different culture and indirectly shows the strength and weaknesses of both cultures (Kim, 2005). By reviewing on both philosophies, each has its own root, principle and the approach in developing and producing the qualified and superior society. This due to the role of knowledge that is not only functions to provide the explanation and information, but the most important, knowledge emerges as the medium in influencing, developing, and also shaping the notion of human and the society itself. Apparently, the Western education emphasizes on active learning, student-centeredness, meaningful-learning, creativity, compliment-giving and close teacher-students relationship. On the contrary, the features in Eastern education are totally opposite from Western education philosophy. However, both educations philosophies that are in two extremes provide the followers with their own advantage.

To begin with, Western education philosophy emphasizes on active learning that involves students' active participation in class and group discussions. Such education builds up students' confidence to speak in front of the class, which results in creating outspoken and confident individuals who do not fear to voice their thoughts. Besides, it also train students to tolerate and accept other's opinions, as well as developing their interpersonal skills as they exchange ideas with each other. In this way, students listen to other's ideas, and at the same time learn from their peers. However, active learning is a time-consuming process and may cause inability to complete teaching the syllabus but it can be encouraged by giving different kinds of exercise to the children (Mackenzie, 2007).

As for the Eastern education, the teachers are fully responsible in performing the effective lessons, and this makes this philosophy implements passive learning in the class. The teachers do not encourage the students to voice out in giving their opinion while the teaching and learning process happen. Thus, students become demotivated and lose interest to the lesson. Since students have limited opportunity to voice their thoughts, it is no wonder that self-conscious and fear often get in their way when they speak in public. Some even prefer to keep their silence and refuse to speak. Thus, a good education philosophy should be an active process, but always accompanied with a good time management.

Furthermore, in Western most students are given the right to manage and take charge of their own learning. Such education focuses on development on individual soft skill, by encouraging the students to be initiative, independent and responsible for their own learning process. However, it may be abused by both slothful teachers and students. For instance, teachers may not teach, but

let the students explore the knowledge on their own, without any advice or guidance from the teachers.

On the other hand, teachers in Eastern education are seen as “knowledge providers” and students act as “knowledge receiver”, instead of practicing students centered learning, which is self-discovery. This situation creates challenge on teachers in the formal system to increase children participation in learning Suffean Hussin. (1996). As a result, students depend on teachers, less initiative, refuse to think and generate new idea. Nonetheless, the teachers are more responsible, as they make sure their students are well-equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills to prepare them for the future. In addition, Eastern education is more systematic with standardized syllabus and timetable. Apparently, to avoid abuse and spoon-feeding, either education cannot be fully implemented, but wisely used by the institutions and teachers based on the suitability of a situation.

From the other view, there is another Western education emphasizes on understanding (meaningful learning), whilst Eastern education emphasizes on memorizing (rote learning). Thus, in Eastern education, students may learn tons of knowledge, but they have no idea of their learning purpose. Since their education involves pure memorizing, there is no construction of schemata network that links their previous knowledge with the new knowledge. Thus, students cannot relate whatever they had learnt with the new knowledge, which take a toll on the development on the concept of knowledge and ideas. As a result, the knowledge they obtain usually will not last long. Obviously, meaningful learning is better than rote learning. However, like active learning, problem of time-limitation may occur.

Moreover, it will be extremely difficult and unwise for teachers to reason everything to the students, as it may be beyond their level of understanding. For instance, a physics or mathematics formula may need certain knowledge in order to understand how it is derived. To avoid students from being more confused, teachers usually ask the students to memorize the formula and teach them how to apply it in problem-solving. To achieve effective teaching, teachers have to use both methods wisely, after analyzing the difficulty level of the knowledge and students’ ability.

Creativity is highly encouraged in Western education. Since students are given freedom to express their creativity, they are not afraid to be different or make mistakes. In fact, they are confident in expressing new ideas and discoveries, which may gain objection or sneering from others. They become adventurous and gain many self-discoveries. As for Eastern, the culture emphasizes on conformity, which stifles creative thinking. Education philosophy must help cultivate and treasure genius, which is the foundation of the capacity for making new discoveries and new creations. By sticking to originality and conformity it’s hard to produce students who are genius and novelty, and without them society reverts to empty repetition. However, Eastern students are more disciplined and have higher morality, as they often conform to rules and religious teaching. Hence, conformity is good for morality, but bad for development of intellectual. Therefore, a good education should encourage conformity to the school’s rules and at the same time encourage creativity in the learning process.

Besides, Western culture believes in complimenting the child to motivate them to work hard. It is a good initiative to be implemented in the education as it helps to build positive self-concept and boost self confidence among students. With positive self-concept, students will have positive thinking about themselves and the world. Once they believe that they can do it, they will work

hard to achieve the goal. Due to self-fulfilling prophecy, such students will stand a high chance to succeed in life. Nevertheless, frequent complimenting will decrease the effect of the compliment. Sometimes, students may not trust teachers' praises anymore, as they are seen as a way to motivate them only. Over-complimenting may also result in over-confidence, which is also known as arrogant. As a result, they may become lazy, thinking that they are perfect and do not need to work hard anymore. Due to the reason, Eastern culture believes in downgrading the child to motivate the child to work hard. This is also implemented in Eastern education, where the teacher criticizes their students when they are wrong but seldom praises them when they do something right. The intention is to give the students a notion that they are not good enough and must work harder. However, such act will also cause students to have negative self-concept, which results in having inferiority complex. Students may become demotivated, not interested and rebellious. Thus, teacher plays an important role to decide the suitability in giving compliments and critics, as it will affect the development of an individual.

Furthermore, in Western students have a good rapport with their teachers. This is highly encouraged, as trusting relationship between teacher and student minimizes antagonism and maximizes mutual understanding. The more intimate the relationship between teachers and students, the more intense the commitment of the participants to the project of learning. Good interpersonal relationship influence students' learning outcomes and enhance the quality of learning. Thus, teachers should treat students as friends and show their love and concern, which will cause students to love them in return. Nonetheless, Western students may not know how to respect their teachers and lack of knowledge on social etiquette when they speak to elderly, as they see everyone as friends. For instance, some of them call their teachers, parents and elderly by their names just like calling a friend. It may show friendliness, but it also shows impoliteness. Unlike Western, there are a large gap between Eastern teachers and students. More often than not, students fear to ask questions or even interact with the teachers. As a result, teachers lose access to students' mind and become ignorant with problems faced by their students, regardless academically or emotionally. Thus, teachers in the Eastern country should change the way they look at their students and be friendlier with a limitation.

In conclusion, there are no exact good and bad for both Western and Eastern education philosophies that are of two extremes, which have pros and cons that are opposite from each other. Since none of them are totally good or bad, full implementation of either education will be no-good. Moderation is the key to success.

The Educational System of Malaysia

By analyzing and comparing the Eastern and Western education philosophies and study the way they bring up an individual, both Eastern and Western education have distinct contrast between them.

Western education emphasizes on active learning that involves students' active participation in class and group discussions whereas eastern education implements passive learning in the class. For the education in Malaysia, students have limited opportunity to voice their thoughts, as most teachers handle the teaching and learning process by their own without listen to students' idea. This brings the result that most of the unemployment of the local graduate because they fail in their interview. In the recent years, the government has focused on this matter and has change

part of the syllables so that to give the students to have the chance to speak or voice their thoughts. For example Malaysian University English Test (MUET), speaking skill will be tested and train the students to give opinion or express their thought during the speaking test. Therefore, during the lesson, teachers will let the students to participate in group discussion or individual presentation in the class.

In addition, for Western education, most students are given the right to manage and take charge of their own learning whereas Eastern education holds on to the concept of teaching. The education in Malaysia lacks on the practice of student-centered learning, where most of students gain knowledge through spoon-feeding, instead of self-discovery. As a result, they become dependent to the teachers. Therefore, nowadays the teachers are being trained to guide the students by giving them guidelines in managing their learning process and discover their abilities and potentials by allowing them to do what they want and encourage them to try their best.

Furthermore, in Malaysian context, the study technique that is more towards memorizing among the student most probably because of exam-oriented and too depend on teachers and these approaches limit the space for creative and critical thinking (Thang, 2004). This is parallel with the education system from Eastern philosophy that emphasizes on memorizing, while Western education emphasizes on understanding. This makes students to memorize the facts in the textbooks rather than understanding it as they are lacking of time. Due to this factor, the education of this country has started to encourage teachers to teach the students by using critical thinking skills so that they can think and understand what had been taught in the classroom rather than memorizing the facts in the textbooks.

Western culture believes in complimenting the child to motivate them to work hard whereas Eastern culture believes in downgrading the child to motivate the child to work hard. In Malaysia, teachers will give compliment to the students who had work hard but also criticize them when they are wrong. The future teachers are all trained to play an important role to decide the suitability in giving compliments and critics. It is because, the achievement of learning and teaching process for both parties, which are teacher and student are not depend on the continuous successful by the students on their academic, but also the development of their norm and values of life.

Finally, the teacher-student relationship in Eastern culture is not a relationship between friends or even equals as compare to the Western education. In Malaysia, teachers are meant to be respected. However, teachers also need to build good interpersonal relationship with the students because it will influence students' learning outcomes and enhance the quality of learning. Thus, teachers should treat students as friends and show their love and concern. A teacher is an idola in school, and he or she is also an individual with full of different values that can influence the children towards the direction of their teaching (Rahimah Haji Ahmad, 1998).

In conclusion, the best education should be the education that utilizes both Eastern and Western education philosophies. The Eastern education philosophy stresses a meaningful life in producing an ideal life of individual and focuses on values that affect the lifestyles, while western education philosophy looks on the learning process at educational institution in producing a knowledgeable and competence students. This is due to the capability of the students to apply and practice what they had learned in class with their daily life (Muhammad, AR. 2003). The combination of both disciplines in teaching and learning process should be in moderation and

limitation, based on the students and also the suitability of a class. It is because, moderation is the key to success and to produce young generation who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation.

References

- Abdullah Sani Yahaya (2001). *Mengurus Hal Ehwal Pelajar*. Selangor: PTS Professional Publishing Sdn Bhd
- Chory, Rebecca M., McCroskey, James C. (1999). The Relationship between Teacher Management Communication Style and Affective Learning. *Communication Quarterly*. v. 27 p 1
- Chia Mun Onn. (2009). *Major differences between eastern and western philosophies as the basis for adult education - The Singapore experience*. Retrieved January 28, 2009, from European Association For Education of Adults. <<http://www.eaea.org/index.php?k=12117>>
- Curren, Randall. (2007). *Philosophy of Education: An Anthology*. United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Dahlin, B & Regmi, M P (2000): Ontologies of knowledge East and West. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13; 43-61.
- Gurney, Philip (2007) Five Factors for Effective Teaching. *New Zealand Journal of Teacher's Work*. Volume 4, Issue 2, 89-98,
- Joyce Lin. *The difference between Western and Eastern education - Education system in need of change?* Retrieved January 23, 2009 <http://2008-soph-writing-nccu.wikispaces.com/file/view/article+on+educaiton.pdf>
- Kim, Kyung Hee (2005). Learning From Each Other: Creativity in East Asian and American Education. *Creativity Research Journal*. Volume 17. Issue 4. pp. 337-347
- Kruger, Angelika and Poster, Cyril (1990). *Community Education and the Western World*. London: Routledge. pg. ix.
- Mackenzie, Jim (2007). Vague and Ambiguous Questions on Multiple-choice Exercises: The Case for. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Volume 26 Issue 1 , p 23-33. Published Online
- Muhammad, AR. (2003). Pendidikan di Alaf Baru [*Education in New Era*]. Yogyakarta: Prisma Sophie.
- Niyozov, Sarfaroz., & Pluim. Gary. (2009). Teachers' Perspectives on the Education of Muslim Students: A Missing Voice in Muslim Education Research. *Curriculum Inquiry*. Volume 39 Issue 5, Pages 583 – 709. (December 2009)
- Rahimah Haji Ahmad (1998). Educational development and reformation in Malaysia: past, present and future. *Journal of Educational Administration*. Volume 36, Number 5, pp. 462-475
- Rohaty Mohd Majzub (1999) *Memahami Jiwa dan Minda Remaja [Understanding The Mind and Soul of Adolescent*. Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti
- Suffean Hussin. (1996). *Pendidikan Di Malaysia: Sejarah, Sistem, dan Falsafah*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. 368-394.
- Teel, Karen Manheim and Andrea DeBruin-Parecki (2001). *Making School Count : Promoting Urban Student Motivation and Success*. New York: Routledge,.
- Thang, Siew Ming (2004). Student Approaches to Studying: identifying the Malaysian constructs and comparing them with those in other contexts. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. Volume 28, Number 4. pp. 359-371
- Thornton, Stephanie. (1995). *Children Solving Problems*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.