**Value Education in the UK: Its Characteristics and Implications**

Shishuai Mao  
Northeast Normal University, Changchun, China  
*Corresponding author: Shishuai Mao*

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**Abstract.** As an established capitalist country, and the birthplace of Anglo culture, the United Kingdom has a profound impact on many countries of world in their politics, economy, culture and other aspects. As a multi-ethnic country, the national identity among citizens is at the heart of the UK’s commitment to value education. In order to promote the common values and cultivate the citizenship among the British, the United Kingdom put forward the “core values” at the beginning of the 21st century. This paper is intended to examine the prominent characteristics of the implementation of value education in the UK, and explore both its references to and implications for the value education in China.

**Introduction**

As an established capitalist country in Europe, the mainstream values in the British society inherited the common characteristics from Western capitalist values, namely, “freedom, equality, fraternity, rationality, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and individualism”. And on this basis, some other universal values such as “fairness”, “justice”, “innovation”, and “sustainable development” were incorporated in the process of globalization. On the other hand, with the intensification of interactions among ethnic groups and the increasing complication of British ethnic groups, in January 2007, the UK Ministry of Education promoted an education program for teaching traditional British values in primary and secondary schools across the country, in order to resist the influence of Islamic extremism and to strengthen the cohesiveness of the British society. In June 2011, in the Prevent Strategy submitted by the British Home Office to the Parliament, the British government, for the first time, defined the UK’s core values in a relatively uniform manner, namely, “democracy, the rule of law, individual freedom, and mutual respect and tolerance among people of different religious faiths and convictions (including unbelievers)”. The reason why it is said to be “relatively uniform” is because the above definition does not appear independently in the glossary of the Prevent Strategy, but only mentioned as the value orientations opposite to the extremism mentioned in the book. Although it is mentioned several times in the body of the book, there is no uniform definition [1]. On June 15, 2014, British Prime Minister David Cameron explained the British core values in a speech commemorating the 799th anniversary of the Magna Carta, which was the cornerstone of the British legal system and freedom: “The faith in freedom, tolerance, personal and social responsibility, and the rule of law, is the value I have discussed, which reflects British characteristics as much as the United Kingdom’s flag, football, fried fish and chips.”[2] From Cameron’s speech, we can see that although the official explanation about the core values of the UK seems to be inconsistent, the basis contents of democracy, rule of law, freedom, tolerance, social responsibility are indeed deeply entrenched in its unique history and culture of the UK. Through examining the prominent features of value education in the UK, this study can provide useful references to and implications for value education in China.

**Government Playing the Lead in Updating the Laws, Regulations, and Curriculum of Value Education with the Pace of the Times**

In the UK, although the government-led value education started late, with the changing times and the needs of the country, the British government has updated the laws and regulations of values education at the pace of the times, especially the curriculum of value education at school. In the
After the Second World War, Britain faced an unprecedented new situation both in economy, politics, culture, religion, and many other aspects. In 1944, the British government promulgated the Butler Education Act to set up a new public education system to help promote the education in the UK. The law stipulates that “national county schools, private schools, and government-subsidized schools should conduct unified religious education, and also allow parents to have the freedom to prevent children from participating in group worship and religious education”[3]. After the Conservative Party led by Mrs. Thatcher came to power in 1979, she implemented the most thorough reform in education in the post-war era and formulated and implemented the Education Reform Act of 1988, aiming to transform the British school education system from public service to private products, withdrawing the rights of local authorities to the central government, to achieve liberalization and nationalization of education. It also incorporated “civic education into the theme of interdisciplinary courses, to establish a unified national curriculum in the UK”[4].

In 1990, the British National Curriculum Council issued and implemented Course Guidance 8: Civic Education, in which it explained in detail the knowledge, attitudes, skills, ethics and values of citizens. In 1997, the UK issued Quality School, which stated that schools should enhance students’ knowledge and understanding of democracy, individual rights and obligations. In 1998, an advisory group led by Bernard Kerrick published the Corek Report, which defined the meaning of citizens and explained the importance of civic education. It also presented the four key stages of civic education at primary and secondary schools, and their respective frameworks, including objectives, guiding principles, assessments, etc. In 2000, the British Qualifications and Curriculum Authority issued the civic education curriculum British National Curriculum: Citizenship, which incorporates two key stages of civic education at primary schools into individual, social and health education as a non-statutory course. At the same time, the two key stages of civic education in secondary schools are implemented as statutory non-core courses. In 2007, the UK Department of Education and Skills issued the Course Review: Diversity and Citizenship, a report on diversity education that aims to bring all students from different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds in the UK to learn to understand and respect others. It also added another important core concept, namely the common values of the UK, which seeks to enhance the national identity and strengthen social cohesion by adding value education to civic education. After the coalition government of Cameron and the Liberal Democrats took office, in the context of multiculturalism, the United Kingdom revised and promulgated a new national curriculum standard for civic education in 2012, Citizenship Education: Learning Plan, which emphasizes rights and obligations, democracy and justice, British identity recognition and diversity, and seeks to enhance national identity through the education of core values in the UK.

The Variety and Diversity of Value Education

The main body of value education in the UK is the school curriculum, which reaches students through statutory courses in all sections of primary and secondary schools and related general courses at the university level, and influences students through other practices.

The first is at the primary school stage, mainly conducted in the PSHE course (“Personal, Social and Health Education”), as a non-statutory course. According to the British National Curriculum, the correct use of material wealth, sex education, family life education, safety, exercise, food and nutrition, personal hygiene, health-friendly environment and natural factors are all touched in this course. In other words, this course covers almost all the problems that students will encounter during their growth, and the content is close to real life, thus practical. It can be seen that the so-called PSHE course in British primary and secondary schools is actually a citizenship course.

The second is the middle school stage. “Traditionally, it is mainly carried out in the field of social
sciences, outlined with history and geography. Although there are no separate subjects (non-nationally prescribed courses) and no national curriculum standards, courses related to them, such as religion education, moral education, social science education, humanities education, personal and social science education, are given 2-4 hours a week.”[5] (1) Religion education. Examining and reviewing the content of religion education in the UK, we can see that the content of modern British religion education has been quite different from that of the early days. As an important way to help cultivate their life, value orientations, spiritual and moral qualities for the younger generation, religion education, on the basis of its openness and diversity, could cultivate their qualities of tolerance and understanding as a global citizen. It has now become a unique way of British civic education. (2) History education. Britain has traditionally regarded history as one of the “Social Studies”. Its main goal is to enable students to learn the traditional British culture, to understand the historical development of the rights and duties of British citizens, and to cultivate students’ national consciousness and morality.

The third is the university stage. (1) Political courses. In view of the lack of development of moral education at British universities, the British government believes that it is quite necessary to set up special political courses for core values education. For example, “Oxford University has offered a series of political theory courses such as ‘The Theory of Nations’, ‘Policy Guidance: The Theory of Democracy’, ‘Analysis of Democratic Institutions’” [6]. (2) Ethics courses. The most common teaching method of ethics education is group discussion. Its purpose is to cultivate students’ ability to think independently, to judge whether certain moral beliefs are in conformity with social requirements, and to reflect on social moral issues. Teachers present specific ethical and moral cases, analyze ethical and moral judgments, and finally demonstrate the core values to college students.

The fourth is various value education activities. In addition to the curriculum, value education at school is also carried out in the UK through some relevant religious activities, sports, music, dramatic and visual arts activities such as gatherings, church, club and student union activities. (1) Religious activities. They mainly include activities such as participation in religious groups and visits to religious and non-religious places of worship. To this end, the Religious Education Association issued the Declaration on Extracurricular Learning in 2006, stating that “as an important part of promoting personal development and learning, every young person should go out of the classroom to experience the world”, and listing public facilities of local communities, such as churches, theaters, and rural experiences, outdoor adventure centers etc.[7]. (2) Sports activities. As one means of character education, sports activities play an important role in the British public schools, and also have a long history of development. The sports activities at British public schools aim to cultivate students’ sports spirit and promote the overall development of students’ character. (3) Social activities. As an important channel for value education in the UK, social activities mainly include social-political activities and social services, among which, participation in election is also an important part. “To reverse the decline in the voter turnout in political elections, the Home Office of the United Kingdom has proposed a program of learning through elections to develop citizenship and responsibility education among students at middle schools. It brings the education of rights and responsibilities of citizens into students’ life because it provides both background information and classroom activities.”[8]

References to and Implications for Value Education in China

An effective arrangement of the curriculum and a systematic design of relevant teaching materials are the premise of value education. In 2000, the United Kingdom integrated value education into the national curriculum and officially implemented it at secondary schools in 2002. “In the 2007 Value Education Reform, the UK has put the Value Education Program in the GCSE exam.”[9] For more than a decade, value education in the UK has achieved a lot through the implementation of specialized citizenship programs at schools. At present, related courses in China only have a limited coverage in contents, and are quite restrained in teaching methods. Thus they cannot meet the needs of “growing new people” that social development in the new era has. To this
end, it is necessary for China to establish a complete curriculum system, linking and integrating civic education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, clarifying the educational goals and contents at all stages. It is also in great need to write and compile a set of textbooks suitable for value education in China’s new era, enriching the teaching methods suitable for students of all ages, and to gradually cultivate students’ civic awareness, and to enhance students’ citizenship.

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