

Humanism-Oriented Research on Misapplication Pitfalls and Optimizing Strategies of Four Core Foreign Language Teaching Approaches

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ABSTRACT

In line with the healthy school development requirements of the 15th Five-Year Plan and the core competency goals of English education, this paper addresses the typical problems in China's basic foreign language teaching, including behaviorist dominance, neglected student affective needs, and prevalent second language acquisition anxiety. Based on Maslow's self-actualization theory and Rogers' humanistic educational theory, this study focuses on four classic humanistic teaching approaches: Community Language Learning, the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response, and Suggestopedia. It explores how the four methods relieve learning anxiety and promote autonomous learning via community interaction, authentic contexts, multi-sensory experience and psychological suggestion. This paper further summarizes four common classroom application misconceptions, namely superficial educational concepts, misplaced classroom subjects, unitary evaluation systems and homogenized teaching design, which are mainly caused by long-term exam-oriented teaching and behaviorist paradigms. Adhering to the humanistic concepts of affective priority, individual difference respect and holistic development, the paper proposes systematic optimization strategies from four aspects: renewing teaching concepts, improving classroom practice, constructing diversified evaluation systems, and implementing graded teaching design.

KEYWORDS

Humanism; Foreign language teaching approaches; Second language acquisition; Core competencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 15th Five-Year Plan for Educational Development issued by the State Council in 2026 puts forward the construction of healthy schools, which specifies the full allocation of psychological teachers, guaranteed physical education class hours, and the alleviation of academic anxiety. Its educational orientation of cultivating sound personalities and attaching importance to students' internal needs is highly compatible with humanistic teaching concepts[1]. Nevertheless, basic foreign language teaching in China has long been dominated by behaviorism. Teaching evaluation overemphasizes the accuracy of linguistic forms while ignoring learners' affective variables, individual cognitive differences, and psychological learning states, which continuously leads to persistent teaching problems such as second language acquisition anxiety, oral output avoidance, declining internal learning motivation, and inefficient language internalization. With the comprehensive implementation of core competency-oriented English education, basic foreign language teaching in China has achieved a transformation from knowledge-centered education to competency-centered education, shifting its teaching focus to individual learner development. It requires classrooms to fully establish student-centeredness, reduce high-pressure error-correction

modes, and build a low-anxiety and secure environment for language acquisition. The humanistic teaching paradigm centers on learners' affective experience and holistic development. Under this theoretical framework, four representative foreign language teaching approaches have been formed, including Community Language Learning, the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response, and Suggestopedia. These approaches effectively solve the inherent drawbacks of traditional behaviorist classrooms that prioritize formal drills over affective experience and rote indoctrination over authentic language acquisition. Although the four teaching approaches have been widely applied in foreign language classrooms, their practical implementation is generally accompanied by biased conceptual interpretation, weakened humanistic values, and rigid teaching modes, which restrict their educational functions. Therefore, systematic sorting and targeted optimization from the humanistic perspective are urgently required.

2. CORE CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1. Definition of Core Concepts

2.1.1. Humanistic Teaching

Emerging in the 1950s and 1960s, humanistic psychology is a crucial theoretical school following behaviorism and cognitive psychology. Different from behaviorism's focus on external stimuli and mechanical responses and cognitive psychology's exclusive emphasis on brain information processing, humanistic psychology adheres to the people-oriented philosophy. Its core values lie in respecting students' dominant status, safeguarding individual dignity, exploring creative potential, and pursuing ultimate goals of personality improvement, self-actualization, and holistic development. Under the long-term influence of exam-oriented education, classroom teaching in China generally presents unbalanced educational tendencies. Most teaching activities prioritize intellectual improvement and knowledge accumulation while neglecting students' affective states, psychological needs, and personalized development, forming a one-sided educational pattern that overvalues intellectual education but undervalues moral and affective cultivation. In the 1970s, humanistic scholars represented by Maslow and Rogers introduced humanistic ideas into educational research, proposing educational reform strategies to address the defects of traditional education. Their theories aim to break the teacher-dominated, one-way knowledge indoctrination mode and correct the problems of ignoring students' affective experience, suppressing personalized expression, and weakening students' subjectivity in traditional classrooms[2]. The derived humanistic teaching paradigm reconstructs teacher-student relationships and teaching logic, establishing a student-centered teaching system that balances affective care and ability cultivation, respects individual differences, and supports independent knowledge construction. In foreign language teaching practice, humanistic teaching regards second language acquisition not as mechanical memorization, sentence recitation, and repetitive training, but as a process of language internalization and personality growth based on learners' life experience, positive affective experience, and subjective initiative. This teaching concept tolerates basic errors in students' language output, abandons high-pressure error correction modes, and focuses on learners' psychological states in the acquisition process, which effectively alleviates learning anxiety and provides solid theoretical support for constructing humanistic, low-anxiety, and high-efficiency foreign language classrooms.

2.1.2. Four Core Humanistic Foreign Language Teaching Approaches

With the in-depth implementation of humanistic educational concepts in foreign language teaching, four typical humanistic teaching paradigms have been developed in accordance with the psychological characteristics and educational laws of second language acquisition: Community Language Learning (CLL), the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response (TPR), and Suggestopedia[3]. Different from behaviorist teaching that emphasizes mechanical drills and linguistic accuracy, the four approaches break the limitations of knowledge-oriented teaching. They

focus on students' dominant status, classroom affective experience, and autonomous acquisition, making up for the deficiencies of traditional foreign language teaching in ignoring psychological needs and individual initiative, and conforming to the competency-oriented reform of basic foreign language education[4]. Specifically, CLL features equal community education. It weakens teachers' absolute authority and builds peer learning communities to relieve second language acquisition anxiety and oral output avoidance, adhering to the principle that affective support outweighs mechanical error correction. Based on natural second language acquisition laws, the Natural Approach focuses on meaningful learning. It abandons fragmented and exam-oriented mechanical training and enables students to perceive and internalize language rules independently through authentic contexts, which conforms to the humanistic concept of autonomous knowledge construction. Suited to adolescent cognitive characteristics, TPR relies on multi-sensory acquisition to reduce cognitive load and learning fear, meeting the needs of students at different levels and realizing hierarchical and inclusive education. Suggestopedia applies subconscious learning and positive psychological suggestion to create a relaxed and low-pressure classroom atmosphere, eliminate learners' psychological defense mechanisms, and improve language internalization efficiency. In summary, the four approaches embody humanistic educational connotations from the dimensions of classroom interpersonal relationships, acquisition logic, cognitive modes, and psychological empowerment, forming common teaching characteristics of low anxiety, high autonomy, and experiential learning. They serve as core practical carriers for the implementation of humanistic theories in foreign language classrooms and lay a conceptual foundation for subsequent classroom practice, misunderstanding analysis, and strategic optimization[5].

2.2. Core Theoretical Connotations

This study is theoretically grounded in Maslow's self-actualization theory and Rogers' educational theories, including meaningful learning theory, student-centered theory, and affective teaching theory. Together, they form humanistic teaching principles of affective priority, respect for differences, autonomous construction, and holistic development, providing theoretical support for solving practical problems in second language acquisition[6][7]. Maslow's self-actualization theory holds that learning is an active process of self-growth and self-improvement rather than passive indoctrination. It requires foreign language teaching to break utilitarian exam-oriented tendencies, focus on students' long-term personality and ability development, and alleviate learning burnout and anxiety by enhancing classroom achievement and sense of belonging[6]. Rogers' meaningful learning theory emphasizes that effective language learning must be based on learners' personal experience and cognitive foundation. Only context-based and learner-centered tasks can promote in-depth language internalization[7]. The student-centered theory subverts traditional authoritative teaching modes, advocates returning classroom dominance to students, respects individual differences in cognitive levels and learning rhythms, and abandons homogenized and one-size-fits-all teaching. Meanwhile, affective teaching theory confirms that affective variables are core factors influencing second language acquisition efficiency. Positive and inclusive classroom environments reduce acquisition anxiety, while high-pressure error correction, mechanical repetition, and negative evaluation lead to decreased learning motivation and oral output avoidance. In conclusion, humanistic theories effectively address the defects of traditional foreign language teaching that prioritizes form over affection and indoctrination over acquisition, providing solid theoretical guidance for the application, misunderstanding diagnosis, and strategic optimization of the four humanistic teaching approaches.

3. CLASSROOM APPLICATION OF THE FOUR HUMANISTIC FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES FROM THE HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Humanistic teaching theories emphasize holistic development, student-centeredness, and affective intervention, offering important guidance for solving mechanized, formalized, and affection-deficient problems in basic foreign language teaching. Compared with the single behaviorist teaching mode that overvalues linguistic accuracy and ignores learners' psychological states, CLL, the Natural Approach, TPR, and Suggestopedia are more consistent with the cognitive and affective development laws of second language acquisition. In practical foreign language classrooms, the four approaches realize educational value through constructing inclusive interpersonal atmospheres, creating authentic language contexts, promoting multi-sensory cognitive participation, and empowering subconscious learning. They effectively compensate for the shortcomings of traditional teaching and show prominent practical advantages in alleviating acquisition anxiety, activating internal learning motivation, and improving language internalization quality.

3.1. Community Language Learning: Alleviating Acquisition Anxiety through Community Interaction

Guided by the humanistic principles of equality, inclusiveness, and community co-construction, CLL thoroughly transforms the traditional teacher-dominated and passive-receptive classroom mode. In teaching practice, teachers weaken authoritative control and take students as classroom subjects, adopting group cooperative learning as the main teaching form. Classrooms encourage free discussion, mutual error correction, and collaborative exploration without excessive pursuit of linguistic standardization, tolerating basic errors in oral expression and sentence application[8]. This low-pressure and supportive community learning atmosphere effectively eliminates students' psychological barriers of fear of mistakes and speaking reluctance, thereby relieving second language acquisition anxiety. Furthermore, group division of labor, peer assistance, and achievement presentation fully respect individual participation value, enabling students with different learning foundations to obtain expression opportunities and academic achievement. This practice effectively implements the humanistic concepts of affective education and inclusive development.

3.2. Natural Approach: Realizing Meaningful Acquisition through Authentic Contexts

Strictly following the natural laws of first language acquisition and Rogers' core proposition of meaningful learning, the Natural Approach abandons the traditional rigid modes of fragmented grammar analysis, mechanical recitation, and exam-oriented drills. In classroom application, teachers create real-life language contexts based on students' life experience and cognitive characteristics, integrating vocabulary, sentence patterns, and grammar knowledge into communicative scenarios. Students complete language input, comprehension, and output naturally in immersive contexts. Instead of forcing rote memorization of language rules, this approach guides students to perceive and summarize linguistic laws independently to realize active knowledge construction. Compared with utilitarian exam-oriented teaching, the Natural Approach focuses more on learning experience and acquisition processes, enables students to recognize the practical value of language, and continuously stimulates internal learning interest, effectively avoiding learning burnout and motivation attenuation caused by mechanical learning.

3.3. Total Physical Response: Reducing Learning Thresholds through Immersive Experience

TPR fully conforms to humanistic requirements of respecting cognitive laws, lowering learning thresholds, and implementing hierarchical education, serving as a vital method for introductory basic foreign language teaching[9]. It integrates auditory input, visual perception, and physical feedback to break the monotonous learning mode of pure listening and paper-and-pencil exercises. In classrooms, teachers design instructional commands, situational interactions, and physical imitation activities based on teaching contents, enabling students to perceive language, understand semantics, and consolidate knowledge in multi-dimensional immersive experience. Multi-sensory linkage learning greatly reduces the strangeness and difficulty of foreign language learning and adapts to students with diverse cognitive foundations and learning abilities. For students with weak foundations and introverted personalities, physical participation reduces expression pressure; for high-achieving students, advanced interactive tasks improve language application competence. Ultimately, TPR realizes the humanistic educational effect of full participation and hierarchical development.

3.4. Suggestopedia: Eliminating Learning Anxiety through Subconscious Relaxed Acquisition

Based on the humanistic logic of affective priority and psychological empowerment, Suggestopedia adopts psychological suggestion, atmosphere creation, and relaxation training as core teaching methods to solve learners' psychological problems such as tension, resistance, and anxiety in second language acquisition[10]. In classroom practice, teachers abandon high-pressure management, frequent error correction, and rigorous assessment. By applying soothing background music, gentle classroom discourse, and immersive situational rendering, the approach reduces exam-oriented tension and relieves students' psychological defense mechanisms. It makes full use of human subconscious learning ability to help learners absorb language information in a relaxed and stable emotional state, significantly improving language input efficiency and knowledge internalization quality. Meanwhile, persistent positive suggestion and guidance strengthen students' positive psychological hints of learning competence and expression confidence, effectively overcoming oral output avoidance and low self-esteem, and constructing the low-anxiety and high-efficiency language acquisition environment advocated by humanistic education[11].

4. ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM APPLICATION MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND CAUSES OF THE FOUR HUMANISTIC FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES

The four humanistic teaching approaches comply with the cognitive and affective characteristics of second language acquisition, effectively making up for the defects of traditional behaviorist foreign language teaching that overemphasizes form while ignoring experience. However, significant gaps exist between their practical application effects and theoretical educational values. Most teachers only copy the external operational forms of the approaches without deeply understanding the humanistic core of holistic development, student-centeredness, and affective priority[12]. Such superficial implementation turns humanistic teaching into formalized classroom design, failing to intervene in students' psychological acquisition processes and fundamentally relieve learning anxiety or activate internal motivation[13]. This paper summarizes four typical common misunderstandings in the classroom application of humanistic foreign language teaching.

4.1. Superficial Teaching Concepts and Void Humanistic Educational Connotations

Restricted by the dual constraints of exam-oriented education systems and behaviorist paradigms, current basic foreign language teaching focuses excessively on knowledge lecturing, grammatical error correction, and score improvement. Most teachers hold one-sided and shallow understandings of humanistic education. In applying the four humanistic approaches, teachers commonly prioritize form over connotation, simply equating group cooperation, situational creation, multi-sensory interaction, and relaxed classroom atmosphere with complete humanistic teaching. Classroom design only pursues formal innovation while ignoring core humanistic goals, neglecting students' affective experience, individual cognitive differences, and psychological acquisition states[14]. Such superficial teaching fails to change the inherent drawbacks of traditional foreign language teaching and makes humanistic education ineffective, restricting the coordinated development of students' linguistic competence and comprehensive literacy.

4.2. Misplaced Classroom Dominance and Passive Student Acquisition

Student-centeredness is the core premise of implementing the four humanistic teaching approaches. Nevertheless, most basic foreign language classrooms suffer from misplaced subject roles. Teachers still dominate the whole classroom by controlling teaching rhythms, learning tasks, and language output standards. Even with the introduction of humanistic teaching activities, all links progress within preset teacher frameworks with rigid procedures and limited personalized expression space. The persistent application of high-pressure error correction, unified training, and standardized output keeps students in a passive state of reception and mechanical practice. Students are unable to independently construct and internalize language knowledge or eliminate psychological speaking barriers, which fundamentally violates humanistic teaching requirements.

4.3. Single Teaching Evaluation System and Absent Humanistic Orientation

The single result-oriented evaluation system adapted to exam-oriented education greatly restricts the implementation of humanistic teaching. Current foreign language teaching evaluation focuses excessively on explicit indicators such as linguistic accuracy, exercise correctness, and sentence standardization, prioritizing final learning results and exam competence while ignoring implicit educational dimensions including classroom participation, affective changes, confidence cultivation, and progressive growth. From the humanistic perspective of holistic and process-based education, single result evaluation fails to meet the requirements of differentiated teaching, cannot exert the incentive and guiding functions of evaluation, and indirectly drives teachers to prioritize skill training over affective cultivation, seriously deviating from humanistic teaching orientation.

4.4. Homogenized Teaching Design and Inadequate Differentiated Teaching Implementation

Teaching students in accordance with their aptitude is a vital humanistic principle and a key path to holistic development. However, the classroom application of the four approaches generally features homogenized teaching design. Most teachers adopt one-size-fits-all teaching plans based on average student levels, without differentiated design according to individual differences in language foundation, cognitive ability, and personality. Undifferentiated task difficulty and teaching rhythm fail to set low-threshold and inclusive basic tasks for underachieving students to reduce learning fear and build confidence, nor provide expanded exploratory tasks for high-achieving students to tap learning potential. Homogenized teaching cannot meet personalized acquisition needs, making it difficult to realize the humanistic goal of hierarchical and inclusive development.

5. OPTIMIZATION STRATEGIES FOR CLASSROOM APPLICATION OF THE FOUR FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES FROM THE HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

The current application of humanistic foreign language teaching approaches is generally plagued by superficial educational concepts, misplaced teacher-student roles, rigid evaluation systems, and homogenized teaching design, resulting in formalized and ineffective humanistic teaching. To address these problems, this chapter proposes systematic optimization strategies from four dimensions: conceptual innovation, classroom practice optimization, evaluation reconstruction, and differentiated teaching design. Guided by humanistic holistic development, student-centeredness, and affective priority principles, aligned with the 15th Five-Year Plan healthy school construction and core competency educational requirements, these strategies aim to eliminate formalized humanistic teaching, construct low-anxiety and high-quality humanistic foreign language classrooms, and promote the in-depth transformation of basic foreign language teaching from knowledge-centeredness to competency-centeredness.

5.1. Concept Innovation: Aligning Humanistic Education with Policy Orientation

Renewing teaching concepts is the fundamental solution to formalized humanistic teaching. Long-term influenced by exam-oriented and behaviorist inertia, basic foreign language teaching has formed a utilitarian educational mindset that prioritizes knowledge and scores over affection and individual growth, which constitutes the root cause of distorted humanistic teaching implementation. Teachers should actively break utilitarian teaching cognition, respond to the healthy school construction requirements of the 15th Five-Year Plan, integrate mental health cultivation, anxiety alleviation, and sound personality development into foreign language teaching, and establish a new teaching philosophy of affective priority, competency orientation, and holistic development. In daily teaching, teachers should abandon the single evaluation standard centered on grammar norms, accuracy rates, and exam scores, and take students' affective experience, personalized development, and autonomous competence improvement as persistent teaching priorities. Meanwhile, teachers are required to deeply grasp the theoretical connotations of the four humanistic approaches, distinguish external operational forms from internal educational logic, and fully exert the community educational value of CLL, meaningful acquisition logic of the Natural Approach, hierarchical advantages of TPR, and psychological empowerment function of Suggestopedia, so as to realize concept-led classroom reform.

5.2. Classroom Optimization: Accurate Implementation of Humanistic Values of Four Teaching Approaches

To solve formalized and extreme deviations in practical teaching, classroom procedures should be optimized according to the core logic of each approach to balance affective experience and knowledge output. For CLL's ineffective interaction problems, teachers need to standardize community cooperation mechanisms, optimize grouping modes, clarify responsibilities and inquiry tasks, and guide in-depth academic communication instead of meaningless casual discussion[15]. The principle of tolerance and priority encouragement should be adhered to to realize collective progress through peer assistance and relieve oral expression anxiety. For the Natural Approach's hollow context and insufficient knowledge accumulation problems, teachers should create authentic life-based communicative scenarios, design cognition-compliant classroom tasks, and balance immersive linguistic intuition training and systematic knowledge sorting to avoid one-sided emphasis on experience over accumulation. For TPR's excessive entertainment and insufficient efficiency problems, teachers should reasonably allocate interactive and lecturing time, reduce learning difficulty through multi-sensory linkage, and design gradient interactive tasks focusing on key and difficult points to unify classroom interest and teaching effectiveness. For Suggestopedia's excessive

relaxation and insufficient classroom management problems, teachers should grasp the moderate boundary of relaxed teaching, apply psychological suggestion and atmosphere creation properly, and balance psychological decompression and knowledge consolidation to avoid loose and inefficient classrooms.

5.3. Evaluation Reconstruction: Constructing Humanistic Diversified Evaluation System

To break the limitations of single and rigid result-oriented evaluation, a diversified classroom evaluation system adapted to humanistic teaching should be constructed based on process education and holistic development concepts, abandoning the score-only and accuracy-only evaluation mode. A three-dimensional evaluation mechanism integrating process and result, knowledge and affection, individual progress and overall development should be established to cover all educational dimensions. In terms of knowledge evaluation, indicators such as language output standardization and knowledge proficiency are retained to guarantee steady improvement of linguistic competence. In terms of process and affective evaluation, implicit educational dimensions including classroom participation, expression confidence, affective changes, and progressive growth are incorporated to fully respect individual development differences. Meanwhile, evaluation methods should be optimized with incentive and inclusive assessment as the main approach, reducing negative high-pressure error correction and providing timely positive feedback for minor progress to protect students' learning enthusiasm and self-confidence. Diversified evaluation guides active classroom participation and gradual elimination of acquisition anxiety, giving full play to the incentive and educational functions of evaluation and adapting to humanistic foreign language teaching reform.

5.4. Hierarchical Design: Implementing Student-Centered Teaching in Accordance with Aptitude

Differentiated teaching is the key practice path for humanistic holistic development and the core strategy to solve homogenized teaching problems. To improve the one-size-fits-all teaching defect, teachers should carry out flexible and gradient teaching design according to individual differences in students' language foundation, cognitive ability, personality traits, and learning rhythms. Teachers should accurately classify student levels through pre-class learning situation investigation and clarify the learning difficulties and development needs of different groups. In-class hierarchical tasks should be designed: low-threshold and inclusive basic tasks for underachieving and introverted students to accumulate confidence and relieve learning anxiety through simple interaction and expression[16]; expanded exploratory tasks for high-achieving students to tap language application potential and solve inefficient learning problems of advanced learners. Flexible adjustment of classroom rhythm and task difficulty adapts to diverse learning paces, enabling every student to achieve progress based on their original level, activate internal learning motivation, and ultimately realize the humanistic goal of personalized and inclusive holistic development.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on humanistic theories, aligned with the 15th Five-Year Plan healthy school construction and English core competency educational requirements, this study systematically explores the classroom application of four humanistic foreign language teaching approaches: CLL, the Natural Approach, TPR, and Suggestopedia. The research confirms that the four approaches effectively compensate for the defects of traditional behaviorist foreign language teaching in ignoring affective experience and individual needs, serving as effective paths to alleviate second language acquisition anxiety and activate learning motivation. Meanwhile, this study summarizes four common practical misunderstandings in current humanistic teaching, including superficial concepts, misplaced subject roles, rigid evaluation systems, and homogenized teaching design, which hinder the realization of

humanistic educational values. Accordingly, this study constructs targeted optimization strategies from conceptual innovation, classroom practice, evaluation reconstruction, and hierarchical design, providing practical references for the reform of humanistic basic foreign language teaching.

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