

Western and Eastern Educational Philosophies

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PART B

The Appraisal of Western and Eastern Educational Philosophies

The education system in the East and West is different due to their different culture and indirectly shows the strength and weaknesses of both cultures (Kim, 2005). By reviewing both philosophies, each has its own root, principle and approach in developing and producing a society. Apparently, the Western education emphasizes **active learning¹, student-centeredness², meaningful-learning³, creativity⁴, compliment-giving⁵ and close teacher-students relationship⁶. On the contrary, the features of an Eastern education are totally opposite from the Western education philosophy.** However, both educational philosophies, which are in two extremes, have followers who promote their own education systems as the best.

To begin with, Western education philosophy emphasizes 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 trains 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 implement 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 in 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 good time management.

Question #1– According to the authors, what is one negative consequence with “active learning”? What is one negative consequence with “passive learning”?

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 skills by encouraging the students to take initiative and be independent and responsible for their own learning process. However, it may be abused by both slothful (lazy) 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. This could create a problem if not carefully controlled by the teacher.

On the other hand, teachers in Eastern education are seen as “knowledge providers” and students act as “knowledge receivers”, 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, take less initiative, and might refuse to think and generate new ideas in class. Nonetheless, the teachers are perhaps 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 and have standardized syllabi and timetables.

Question #2 – What is one benefit of Western students “taking charge” of their own learning? What is one potential drawback (negative)? What is one positive and one negative aspect of Eastern education where students are “knowledge receivers” instead of discovering ideas for themselves?

Another point of Western education is the emphasis understanding (meaningful learning), while Eastern education emphasizes 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 linking and connection of their previous knowledge with the new knowledge. Thus, students cannot relate whatever they had learned in class with new knowledge they experience somewhere else, which *takes a toll on (hurts)* the development of 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-limitations 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, to really understand a physics or mathematics formula, students may need to know additional 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 to problem-solving. To achieve effective teaching, teachers have to use both methods wisely, after analyzing the difficulty level of the knowledge and students' ability.

Question #3: Do you think sometimes it is appropriate for teachers to make their students just memorize things instead of really explaining the reason behind it? Or, do you think students should always understand why they are doing something and how something works? Explain with an example or two.

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 conformity, which stifles (hinders/prevents) 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 can think of new ideas, and without them, society could revert to empty repetition. However, Eastern students are more disciplined and have higher morality, as they often conform to rules and religious teaching. Hence, conformity might be good for morality, but bad for the development of intellectualism. Therefore, a good education should encourage conformity to the school's rules and at the same time encourage creativity in the learning process.

Question #4 – What is the problem with too much conformity, according to the authors?

What about the differences between complimenting and criticizing?

Western culture believes in complimenting the child to motivate them to work hard. It is a good initiative to be implemented in education as it helps to build positive self-esteem and boost self confidence among students. With positive self-esteem, students will have positive thinking about themselves and the world. Once they believe that they can do it, they will work hard to achieve their goals. 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 results in over-confidence, which is also known as arrogance. As a result, students 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-esteem, which results in having an inferiority complex. Students may become demotivated, not interested and rebellious. Thus, the teacher plays an important role to decide the suitability in giving both compliments and criticism, as it will affect the development of an individual.

Question #5 – When I grades your papers, what % of my comments should be positive, and what % should be negative (for example, should I write 90% positive things and 10% negative things or something else)? Why? Should the % change if you get an A? What about an F? Explain.

Lastly, in Western systems, students have a good rapport with their teachers. This is highly encouraged, as a 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, Western teachers sometimes 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 knowledge on social etiquette when they speak to the 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 may show impoliteness. Unlike in Western society, there is 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' minds and become ignorant with problems faced by their students, regardless if these problems are academic, social, or emotional problems. These teachers sometimes "lose touch" with students and don't understand them well.

Question #6 – Should there be a big “gap” between teachers and students? Should teachers and students be close or remain distant? Why?

In conclusion, neither system is perfect and both 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 perhaps not be ideal. Moderation is the key to success.

Question #7 – Go back and look at the 1st paragraph in this PART 2. Notice the six critical components (**in bold**) of a Western educational philosophy. The authors then state there are six opposite features in an Eastern educational philosophy as well, but don't list them right away. Fill out the chart below. I did the first one for you as an example.

	Western	Eastern	What Paragraph(s) Describe These?
1.	Active learning	Passive Learning	#2 and #3
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			