

A Study on the Strategies for Moral Education in College English in the Digital Context

Yaqin Lu, Yanfang Wang

Zhiyuan School of Liberal Arts, Beijing Institute of Petrochemical Technology, Beijing, China

Abstract: *With the rapid advancement of information technology and the in-depth promotion of educational digital transformation, the construction of moral education in College English courses is confronted with new opportunities and challenges. Based on an analysis of the current situation and existing problems of moral education in College English teaching, this paper systematically explores the strategies for digitally empowering the construction of moral education in College English from four dimensions: reconstruction of teaching content, innovation of teaching methods, construction of cross-cultural communication platforms, and improvement of teachers' comprehensive literacy as well as their competence in moral education. It aims to provide theoretical references and practical experience for the teaching reform of moral education in College English teaching.*

Keywords: *problems and strategies in English teaching; College English; moral education; smart teaching platform*

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The *College English Teaching Guidelines* (2020 Edition) states that language education should create authentic linguistic contexts, deeply integrate moral elements into the entire teaching process, and utilize modern educational technologies to construct a multi-modal and interactive learning environment[1]. It emphasizes the importance of making the teaching environment authentic, natural, and engaging, thereby helping students develop correct worldviews and values. By fostering a vivid and immersive teaching atmosphere, educators can guide students to develop a correct worldview. The digital transformation of education stands as one of the key initiatives launched by the Ministry of Education to advance the modernization of higher education and deepen teaching quality reforms in universities[2].

As a compulsory public basic course offered to nearly all undergraduates, College English features extensive coverage, abundant class hours and a large student population, making it a crucial platform for moral education. Beyond its instrumental function of cultivating students' English proficiency and cross-cultural communicative competence, College English undertakes the humanistic missions of value guidance, cultural immersion and personality shaping. In the digital era, how to fully leverage the advantages of information technology to integrate moral elements into every stage of College English teaching and to achieve the integration of knowledge imparting, ability training and value guidance has become a vital research topic in College English teaching reform. However, the construction of moral education in College English from the perspective of digital empowerment still faces challenges. Exploring strategies to optimize such education and investigating relevant improvement paths can effectively enhance the effectiveness of moral education and provide valuable references for the digital transformation of higher education.

1.2 Research Content

In the context of digital transformation, integrating moral education into College English teaching to cultivate all-round talents holds significant value. As a widely offered course in higher education, College English course faces numerous problems and challenges. For instance, it is urgent to address such issues as how to tap moral resources deeply via smart platforms including Rain Classroom, Unipus and Moso Teach, how to break the barriers between online and offline teaching to realize the regular integration of moral elements, as well as how to motivate teachers to innovate in digitally-enabled moral teaching.

To address the above practical problems, the study, based on constructivism theory, analyzes the current situation and problems of moral education in College English, and puts forward some strategies and educational pathways for moral education. Through this study, it aims to provide certain practical references for universities to advance the reform of digital moral education in College English and enhance the effectiveness of College English teaching.

2. Current Problems in Moral Education of College English

2.1 Limitations of the Integration of Moral Education and Language Skills

As is pointed out in the College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition), College English courses possess both instrumental and humanistic attributes[1]. Instrumentality refers to the practical value of knowledge itself, while humanism emphasizes a people-oriented approach, teaching students to care for, cherish and respect others, to pursue truth, goodness and beauty, and to focus on the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities and all-round development. Traditional teaching methods often separate language skill learning from moral education, making it difficult for students to understand and absorb moral content while learning English. Some teachers regard moral education as an additional and non-mainstream educational component, only dedicating a few minutes at the beginning or end of class to "moral embellishment", failing to integrate value guidance throughout the entire teaching process, which causes moral education usually to become a mere formality rather than an integral part that is closely connected to language learning. This approach, which mainly emphasizes the imparting of language knowledge and neglects the value of the course, also fails to stimulate students' desire for knowledge, or cultivate their humanistic qualities such as emotions, attitudes and values. These factors have led to unsatisfactory implementation of moral education in College English, which urgently needs to be addressed through systematic reforms[3]. Therefore, to achieve value guidance and talent cultivation orientation, College English teaching should promote the shift from a knowledge-based paradigm to competency-based and value-based paradigms, thereby strengthening its humanistic value.

2.2 Inadequate in Student Participation and Critical Thinking Development

Traditional teaching models emphasize teacher-centered lecturing and knowledge inculcation while neglecting the importance of students' active participation and expression of their own viewpoints. In the process of integrating moral education into English classrooms, students often receive the values passively, lacking space for independent thinking and critical analysis, which restricts the development of students' critical thinking abilities and also weakens their interest and engagement with moral education content. Furthermore, in classroom interactions and discussions, students may choose to remain silent due to lack of encouragement or fear of expressing incorrect viewpoints, which further limits their thinking and expression. Particularly when dealing with some sensitive topics such as value judgments and cultural comparisons, students tend to remain silent to avoid conflicts with teachers or peers, which not only hinders the development of students' critical thinking but also makes it difficult for teachers to grasp students' ideological dynamics and value orientations accurately[4].

Due to this passive approach, students may fail to understand and absorb the implications of moral education fully, and it is also difficult for them to transform what they have learned into their own value identification and behavioral norms. Students' understanding of moral content remains at the level of superficial memorization, failing to form deep emotional resonance and internalize values.

2.3 Deficiency in Cultural Adaptability and Diversity of Digital Teaching Resources

With the advancement of educational digitalization, various online resources and digital tools have been widely applied in teaching, which enhance teaching efficiency and student engagement, but there are still obvious deficiencies in multicultural adaptability:

On the one hand, digital resources lack adaptability and sensitivity to students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Some online courses and digital materials may fail to consider the actual needs of students with diverse cultural backgrounds. In moral education, some digital resources are dominated by Western culture, presenting insufficient Chinese cultural elements, or even interpreting Chinese culture with stereotypes and one-sided interpretations. This situation is particularly prominent in moral education, as its content and methods must fully account for students' cultural backgrounds and values. The lack of

cultural sensitivity in teaching content may cause students to feel alienated, or even trigger misunderstanding and resistance, thereby affecting the acceptance and effectiveness of moral

On the other hand, the balance between Chinese and Western cultures is not precisely grasped. College English courses involve a large amount of Western cultural content. How to effectively convey Chinese voice and tell Chinese stories well while introducing Western culture remains one of the most difficult parts in current situation. Some digital resources attach inadequate importance to English expression and dissemination of Chinese culture, failing to guide students to treat different cultures a dialectical and open attitude. There is a lack of objective and rational analysis in the comparison between Chinese and Western cultures[5].

In addition, the inadequacy of existing online learning platforms and resource libraries in terms of cultural diversity also restricts the in-depth development of moral education. Teachers need to make flexible adjustments when using digital tools to meet the learning needs of students from different cultural backgrounds.

2.4 Delayed Development of Teachers' Digital Competencies and Moral Educational Roles

The widespread application of educational technology has put forward new requirements for College English teachers, which demands teachers to act not only as knowledge imparters but also as learning facilitators and interaction promoters. However, teachers currently face numerous challenges in the process of role transformation.

First, teachers' digital technology application competencies are insufficient. Many teachers may lack necessary technical training and practical experience. Some teachers merely employ digital technology as an auxiliary tool for traditional teaching, confining its use to superficial functions such as PowerPoint presentation and video play, and fail to take full advantages of digital technology in the delivery of moral resources and personalized value guidance.

Second, teachers' literacy in moral education needs to be improved. Some English teachers lack adequate awareness of the importance and necessity of moral education, demonstrating insufficient initiative in participating in its teaching. Meanwhile, some teachers have limited theoretical literacy in moral education, with insufficient knowledge in areas such as excellent traditional Chinese culture and current affairs and politics, making it difficult for them to apply such knowledge readily and coherently in teaching. Besides, some teachers may also lack necessary training in cross-cultural communication, which makes it hard for them to effectively address the challenges of moral education in the digital environment.

Therefore, changes in digital teaching have put forward new challenges for teachers, who need to constantly update their educational concepts and learn new teaching methods, so as to better meet students' learning needs. Traditional teaching focuses on knowledge transmission and examination scores, while in the digital era, more emphasis is put on stimulating students' learning interest and critical thinking. Faced with such changes, some teachers have not yet completed the role transformation. They still adopt a teacher-centered approach in teaching design, neglecting students' subjectivity and personalized needs.

3. Strategies for Moral Education of College English in the Digital Era

3.1 Promoting the In-Depth Integration of Moral education with Language Skills

From the aspect of content design, it is necessary to break down the fragmentation between moral content and language materials, and establish a two-way mapping mechanism. In the process of textbook compilation and teaching resource development, the principle of "taking language as the carrier, culture as the bridge, and value as the core" should be followed, and moral elements should be systematically embedded into various language skill modules, including vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing and translation. For example, in vocabulary teaching, centering on the theme of "ecological civilization", related vocabulary clusters such as carbon neutrality, sustainable development and green economy can be organized, so that students can understand China's responsibility and commitment in global climate governance while expanding their vocabulary. In translation teaching, bilingual texts from authoritative documents such as Government Work Reports should be selected to enable students to master standard English translation of Chinese discourse from authentic corpus, thereby enhancing their international communication competence.

Second, the approaches of integration are equally important. A combined strategy of "implicit infiltration and explicit guidance" shall be adopted. To address the current awkward and forced integration of moral elements, greater emphasis should be placed on the implicit permeation function of moral education. In the selection of language materials, texts with rich moral meanings shall be prioritized, which can help students receive value-oriented influences through reading comprehension and discussion. Meanwhile, explicit guidance shall be provided at critical teaching contents. With teachers' targeted enlightenment, students can be guided to clarify ambiguous perceptions and deepen their value identification. For instance, when analyzing the topic about "Common Prosperity", teachers can guide students to compare the perspectives of Chinese and international media to expose the differences embedded in Western discourse through linguistic analysis, and thus strengthen students' understanding of and identification with China's development path. In this way, the integration of implicit infiltration and explicit guidance can be combined smoothly and naturally.

Third, in the whole teaching stages, the most important part is implementation, that is, a full-chain integration, which includes pre-class, in-class and after-class stages, should be established. During the stage of pre-class, preview tasks are distributed by smart teaching platforms, such as Rain Class, Unipus, to help students study those moral materials by themselves, they should finish the first reading of language texts, and conduct preliminary reflection on some moral questions. During the stage of in-class, language practice activities centered on moral themes, including group discussions, role-plays, debates and presentations, are designed to help students deepen their comprehension of moral content. After class, extended learning tasks are assigned, which include writing English essays on moral themes, producing bilingual posters, and participating in online discussions of moral themes, thereby consolidating and extending classroom learning outcomes. This full-chain integration mechanism ensures that moral education permeates the entire teaching process and deepens students' value internalization, realizing the shift from superficial reception to deep value internalization.

3.2 Fostering Students' Critical Thinking and Deepening Engagement in Moral Education

In order to transform the current situation in which students passively receive moral education, stimulating students' autonomy, cultivating their critical thinking abilities, and enhancing both the depth and effectiveness of their moral learning are the most important measures that should be taken.

First, based on authentic problems, teachers should design provocative and open-ended moral topics, such as "Cultural Identity Crisis in the Context of Globalization" and "Governance of Disinformation in the Social Media Era." These topics are both closely aligned with students' daily lives and imbued with profound moral significance. Besides, working in small groups, students engage in activities, including data collection, argumentation and proposal design, to achieve deep learning through English language practice. This problem-based learning model breaks the traditional teacher-dominated classrooms, transforming students from passive knowledge recipients into active learners, who develop critical thinking and value identification naturally throughout the learning process.

Second, teachers should abandon the "standard answer" mindset, respect students' diverse perspectives, and guide them to substantiate their arguments with evidence and logic. Through sustained critical thinking practice, students gradually learn to distinguish between facts and opinions, and thus their critical thinking competence is enhanced. Meanwhile, a harmonious classroom culture strengthens students' willingness to actively participate in classroom activities, so moral education thus shifts from a passive mode of "being told to listen" to an active mode of "wanting to speak", with its educational effectiveness significantly improved.

With the support of smart platforms, teachers can accurately assess each student's interests and cognitive level, and thus deliver personalized moral learning resources. For example, for students interested in technological development, English-language reports and documentaries on China's scientific and technological innovations should be provided; for students keen on social issues, some English academic articles on China's social governance experience should be recommended. This personalized resource delivery enhances the relevance of moral content to students' individual concerns and stimulates their learning motivation. Meanwhile, through online collaborative platforms, students are supported in conducting cross-class and cross-institutional English project cooperation on moral themes, for instance, students are assigned to make a series of short videos titled "Promoting Chinese Culture in English". Through such authentic language tasks, students' sense of participation and sense of cultural mission are effectively strengthened.

3.3 Enhancing the Value Guidance and Cultural Communication Effectiveness of Digital Resources

Teachers should widely select teaching materials, such as English articles, videos and cases covering global social, political and cultural issues. Special attention shall be placed on materials that reflect contemporary China's development achievements, such as typical cases in the fields of the fight against poverty, scientific and technological innovation, and ecological civilization development. These materials serve to tell in English the stories of Chinese people striving to realize their dreams, and China's pursuit of peaceful development and win-win cooperation. These various resources lay a solid foundation for teachers to effectively disseminate Chinese culture in teaching.

With the help of digital tools such as smart teaching platforms, online course systems and learning applications, Chinese cultural elements should be integrated into the design of these platforms to ensure that students have access to culturally diverse learning resources. Meanwhile, the platforms ought to be equipped with cultural comparative analysis tools, enabling students to conveniently compare, analyze and reflect on Chinese and Western cultural elements during their learning process. For instance, when students read English articles concerning individualism and collectivism, the platform can automatically push relevant cultural backgrounds and theoretical interpretations, assisting students in establishing a dialectical cultural understanding.

For teachers, they should focus on continuity between ancient and modern times and adopt a comparative perspective between China and foreign countries, showcasing both the profound heritage of excellent traditional Chinese culture and the vibrant dynamism of contemporary China. For instance, when teaching the unit on "Festival Culture", teachers should not only introduce Western festivals such as Christmas and Thanksgiving, but also elaborate on traditional Chinese festivals, such as Spring Festival, Qingming Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival, to guide students to introduce Chinese culture in English. By adopting this kind of strategy, teachers can help students strengthen their cultural confidence and form a correct cultural stance through cross-cultural comparison.

3.4 Promoting the Transformation of Teachers' Digital Competence in Moral Teaching

First and foremost, the integration of moral education into College English poses new challenges to teachers. The implementation of this educational approach requires College English teachers not only to master solid professional expertise, but also profound and sound competence. Through theoretical study and close attention to current affairs, College English teachers should continually expand their knowledge scope, enrich their knowledge reserves, and elevate their professional competence, while cultivating sharp observation and insight into social phenomena and real life, which requires College English teachers to continuously explore their professional fields and enhance their study of political theory. In particular, they should thoroughly grasp the major principles and policies of the Communist Party of China and firmly uphold the core socialist values.

To address teachers' deficiencies in digital technology application and moral education design, differentiated training content should be established, which should ensure that all teachers acquire fundamental technical competencies for digital teaching and foster their innovative competence in digital instruction. With the goal of enhancing teachers' design competence for moral education, advanced training centered on comprehensive qualities including intercultural communicative competence and communication awareness should be provided.

At the institutional level, universities should incorporate the teaching of moral education into teachers' overall development, and provide teachers with professional services covering theoretical research, resource development and consulting guidance. They should regularly organize experience exchange meetings, achievement exhibitions and academic seminars on the development of moral education, so as to foster a campus cultural atmosphere that attaches importance to this initiative and supports reform and innovation. Through the cultivation of an organizational support culture, teachers can fully perceive the university's attention and support in the digital reform of moral teaching, which can strengthen their professional identity and confidence in the reform, and thus adapt to role transformation and enhance their teaching competence.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the construction of moral education in College English in the digital context is a complex endeavor. Digital technologies provide new empowering pathways for such education, yet technologies alone cannot automatically yield desired nurturing outcomes. The key part lies in the integration of technology with moral education. In the future, continuous efforts should be made to deepen the integration of digitalization and moral education, with targeted efforts devoted to addressing integration dilemmas, optimizing cultural presentation and empowering teacher development. By doing so, the quality of College English courses can be steadily enhanced to cultivate talents of the new era with a strong sense of national and family sentiment, a global vision and intercultural competence.

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