

A Study on the Elements of Ideology and Politics in English Reading Comprehension of National Matriculation Entrance Test from 2018 to 2022

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Abstract: Since entering the new era, the construction of ideological and political education has become a crucial part of the “great ideological and political” education pattern. This study analyzes the English reading comprehension of the 2018-2022 National Matriculation Entrance Test in China, focusing on the integration of ideological and political education. And identifies three main themes: “cultural foundation,” “independent development,” and “social participation.” While the distribution of ideological and political elements is uneven, the reading comprehensions cover these themes. The study finds that socialist core values and harmonious natural consciousness are the most prominent ideological and political concepts, while labor consciousness and cultural confidence receive less attention. Overall, the National Matriculation Entrance Test English reading texts emphasize the cultivation of virtue and character. The findings of this study aim to provide insights for exam setters, as well as guidance for high school English teachers and exam users.

Keywords: National Matriculation Entrance Test; English reading comprehension; Curriculum ideological and political education

1. Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party and the state have attached great importance to the fundamental educational task of cultivating morality and talents. In 2015, the “One Point, Four Sides” basic principle proposed by the Examination Center of the Ministry of Education, and it also emphasized the core point of adhering to moral education and cultivating people while strengthening the examination of excellent traditional Chinese culture, socialist core values, the concept of rule of law and innovation ability. The “one layer and four wings” in the *China National College Entrance Examination Evaluation System* also revolves around the core of cultivating virtue and talent. The National Matriculation Entrance Test increasingly emphasizes on constructing ideological and political education in foreign language courses, and adhering to the core of cultivating morality and talents. Through the analysis of English reading comprehension in National Matriculation Entrance Test from 2018-2022, the ideological and political elements are explored, and the ‘humanistic’ characteristics of the National Matriculation Entrance Test reading comprehensions are explored to achieve the educational goal of cultivating morality and talents. It is expected to provide some inspiration to the setters of the National Matriculation Entrance Test and also provide a reference for high school English teachers and users of National Matriculation Entrance Test (hereafter abbreviated: NMET).

2. Curriculum Ideology and Politics

This term was firstly proposed in 2016, which was to make all kinds of courses work in the same direction as ideological and political theory courses and collaborate to educate people. Subsequently, in 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the *Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Curriculum*, providing a basis for implementing ideological and political education in the curriculum.

Curriculum ideological and political education refers to the implementation of ideological and political education in non-ideological and political courses (general fundamental courses, professional

education courses, practical courses), establishing a mechanism for various courses to follow the same direction, and jointly promoting the achievement of the goal of cultivating moral character^[1]. The research in the field of ideological and political education in the curriculum mainly focuses on two aspects. The first aspect is the theoretical exploration aspect, mainly exploring the historical development, positioning, connotation, and significance of curriculum ideological and political education. Gao and Zong first elaborated on the theoretical educational function of curriculum ideological and political education from the perspective of how ideological and political courses in the higher education system were transformed into curriculum ideological and political education^[3]. Ding illustrated from the perspective of collaborative ideological and political education, and these studies have enriched the theoretical foundation of ideological and political education in English course to some extent^[2].

The second lies in practical application. Many scholars have integrated relevant theoretical basis to explore the implementation path and strategy of curriculum ideology and politics. It is mainly reflected in four aspects: teachers, teaching materials, ideological and political resources, and system construction. For example, Liu constructed the curriculum's ideological and political system from multiple perspectives, such as schools, ideological and political resources, teachers, and educational methods^[4]. Zhang explored the curriculum's ideological and political construction path from the aspects of education objectives, teaching materials, the teaching process, and evaluation^[6].

The relevant research is popular, but few studies combine National Matriculation Entrance Test English reading comprehension and curriculum ideology and politics. For a long time, the instrumentality of National Matriculation Entrance Test have been magnified infinitely, while the humanistic characters conveyed by the reading have been ignored. Therefore, this study combines both to explore the hidden ideological and political elements of National Matriculation Entrance Test English reading topics.

3. Analysis of Curriculum Ideological and Political Elements in English Comprehension of National Matriculation Entrance Test (NMET).

There are a total of 76 reading comprehensions in the national English test paper from 2018-2022, of which there are three sets of test papers from 2018 to 2019, with a total of 24 reading papers. In 2020, there are five sets of English test questions with a total of 20 readings, and in 2021 and 2022, there are four sets of test questions with a total of 32 reading comprehensions. By analyzing the ideological and political elements in reading comprehension it can provide specific directions for cultivating students "core competencies." The "Core Literacy for the Development of Chinese Students" clearly states that core competencies are divided into "cultural foundation," "independent development," and "social participation." This study is based on the theoretical foundation of Chinese students' core competencies. It takes three major aspects and six major competencies as the framework to sort out the ideological and political elements of the curriculum. The specific classification is shown below:

Table 1: The performance of Curriculum ideology and politic elements

Cultural Foundation	cultural deposits	humanistic accumulation Humanistic sentiments aesthetic taste
	scientific spirit	rational thinking Critical questioning
Autonomous development	learning to learn	Fond of learning diligent reflection Information conscious
	Healthy living	Health life
social participation	responsibility	social responsibility national identity International understanding
	Innovation	Labor consciousness problem solving technology application

3.1 Cultural Foundations

These reading comprehensions convey humanistic sentiments and scientific spirit, including aesthetic sentiments and critical thinking. The ideological and political concept of "cultural foundation" has been unconsciously formed among students. This coincides with the 2017 edition of the *English Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High Schools*, which states "cultivating students noble moral

character and healthy aesthetic taste.”^[5]

3.1.1 Cultural Deposits

Cultural deposits include humanistic accumulation, humanistic sentiments, and aesthetic taste. Among them, the ideological and political concept of humanistic accumulation permeated in passage B of NMET III in 2018, 2019, and 2020, as well as in new NMET I. These topics are designed to help students understand knowledge in the humanities field both domestically and internationally and to experience the history of traditional Chinese culture. Students would walk into the Canadian forests and experience their unique culture and history. They also would visit the tourism culture of four countries, including France and Spain. And open a new chapter in Uzbekistan’s travelogue. These are all through cultivating students’ “humanistic accumulation” literacy through text.

Humanistic sentiments are a people-oriented consciousness about survival, development, and happiness. They are shown in 2020 new NMET II passage B, passage C of NMET II in 2021, and passage C of NMET II in 2022. Through the theme “Grandma’s Box”, this passage would build a harmonious relationship with students, then experience the author’s “nostalgic feelings” after moving. Besides, students can experience the original intention of people who can also start an unforgettable journey to Antarctica even at an advanced age. This kind of humanistic sentiment also infiltrates “ideology and politics.”

In addition, reading comprehensions also show the theme consciousness of “aesthetic taste.” Take passage A of NMET II and new NMET I in 2020, passage A of NMET II in 2021, passage B and C of new NMET I&II in 2021, Passage A of NMET I and NMET II in 2022 for example. These passages mean that students would enjoy the lake District, feel the charm of music, open the photography chapter, enter the theatre, and appreciate the beauty of art exhibition and poetry. The topic behind these passages are aim to guide students to have the awareness and ability to discover, perceive, appreciate, and evaluate beauty with healthy aesthetic value and artistic expression ability.

3.1.2 Scientific Spirit

Topics, as in the new NMET I passage D in 2020 and 2021 passage D of NMET I and NMET II in 2021, require students to use critical and dialectical thinking to question the criteria of genius and define emotional intelligence from multiple perspectives. At the same time, students can use scientific thinking to be intelligent. Such as recognizing the influence of dining companions on food intake, and learning about the effects of noise on human creative thinking. These are what the National Matriculation Entrance Test setters want to present: guiding students to advocate true knowledge and explore bravely through text reading. And it is also the important embodiment of integrating ideological and political elements.

3.2 Autonomous Development

By solving reading comprehension, students can correctly obtain information and enjoy learning, as well as understanding and exploring self-value with positive psychological quality. These reading topics are designed to cultivate students “self-development” in ideological and political ideas.

3.2.1 Learning to Learn

Learning to learn includes being fond of learning, diligent in reflecting, and being aware of information. Students shall have a positive attitude towards learning and the awareness for ability of lifelong learning. At the same time, they should be able to reflect on their own life and learning status. On this basis, they should be able to consciously and effectively acquire and identify information, be aware of network safety information, and take learning as a compulsory course in life.

From the topic “youth reading” to book introduction, from encourage re-reading to return to library reading, these themes have imperceptibly conveyed the idea of “ideology and politics,” which make students enjoy learning and have conscious of lifelong learning. Concurrently, with the advent of the Internet era, many people are addicted to the Internet, and fewer people will go to the library for deep reading and thinking. It is the consciousness that comes to this point. The setter of the NMET add this ideological and political element to reading and guide students to develop a good reading habits.

Of course, setters of NMET also focus on how students can effectively access, identify, and use information in the learning process. This is well reflected in NMET III passage A in 2018, NMET I passage A in 2020, new NMET I passage A, as well as new NMET II passage A. When stepping on the attractions, students can effectively get information about the mode of travel, tickets, etc. Topic about

“Railroad tickets,” students can get the correct information about the required number of trains. Topic about “Choosing a hostel,” students can screen and compare the information among hostels. Furthermore, by evaluating courses, students can understand specific information from multiple perspectives. When traveling in a group, students can provide accurate information. Being information-aware is an important quality for learning to learn.

Learning to learn should also be accompanied by diligent reflection. This can be well-reflected in these papers. In the NMET II passage A, more and more Americans like to reflect while dining alone. While in the passage B of the new NMET II in 2022, students can reflect on the impact of new media on family upbringing and life. That means reflection is also a mandatory lesson for us.

3.2.2 Healthy Living

Many topics also permeate the concept of “healthy life” in reading comprehension. For example, passage B in NMET I and NMET II in 2018 promote healthy eating, encouraging students to balance nutrition and eat more green fruits. Other vivid examples are passage C of NMET I in 2020, passage A of NMET I in 2021, and passage D of New NMET II in 2022. These reading topics are all based on sports, guiding students to pay attention to their physical health and strengthen their bodies through sports. In addition, reading materials also guide the students to have a sound personality, positive psychological quality, optimism and strength, and not be defeated by difficulties. These are well permeated in passage B of NMET I.

3.3 Social Participation

The reading comprehension topics of the NMET are rich in materials, ranging from animal protection and environmental protection to cultural self-confidence and cultural diversity to the responsibility of selfless dedication. The aim is to cultivate students’ core quality of “social participation.” These all lead students to pay attention to the relationship between man and nature, man and society. “Social participation” does not only mean that students actively participate in social practice activities and continuously improve their awareness of social responsibility. It also means increasing their national identity and broadening their international perspectives.

3.3.1 Responsibility

Responsibility includes social responsibility, national identity, and international understanding. The dimension of social responsibility also include the relationship between human beings and society, as well as human beings and nature. National identity have both cultural and value dimensions. International understanding involves cultural diversity and cross-cultural communication, understanding the process of human civilization and the dynamics of world development, and establishing a sense of the community of human destiny. Reading comprehensions (2018-2022) have organically integrated with the elements of thinking and politics, such as harmonious coexistence with nature (environmental protection, animal protection), the spirit of caring and dedication, cultural diversity, and socialist core values.

As an important aspect of social engagement, social responsibility conveys a thematic awareness of living in harmony with nature. For example, passage A and passage D of NMET I in 2018, passage D of NMET I and passage C of NMET II in 2020, Passage B of NMET III and passage D of new NMET II in 2020, passage B of NMETII, passage C of NMETI and passage C of new NMET I in 2021, as well as passage B of new NMET II in 2022. Each of these pieces describes the importance of environmental protection from different perspectives. These topics, from luminous plants to tropical rainforests, from stopping old energy-consuming equipment to protect the environment to the pollution of the environment by plastic straws, are aimed to appeal for environmental protection. Besides, students can address ecological imbalances through reading the passage of beaver rat skins, and enhance the breeding of rare black rhinos in nature reserves. By reading the topic “Implement the Federal Duck Stamp Act,” students can rise awareness to protect animals. In recent years, the environmental pollution problem has worsened, which aroused setters’ attention by conveying the concept of harmony between man and nature of the ideological and political concept is very necessary.

In addition, another aspect is on the social level: understanding and communication, generosity and others, care and dedication, and the meaning of volunteer work. Passage D of NMET II in 2018 and passage D of NMET I in 2019, which require students to be generous and treat others when communicating with them. Passage B of NMETI and NMET II in 2019 reflect the ideological and political elements of caring for students’ psychology and the significance of participating in volunteers,

and changing the lives of oneself and others through volunteer teaching. This cultural consciousness is an important manifestation of socialist core values.

Take passage C of NMET III in 2018 for example: integrating traditional culture into modern architecture can reflect building cultural confidence and practicing socialist core values. In this culture, setters of NMET have subliminally integrated into the concept of ideology and Politics in English reading comprehension.

In recent years, international understanding, as a part of social participation, conveys the vision of cultural differences, the process of human civilization, and the community of shared future with mankind. For example, passage C of NMET I in 2018 focuses on decrease language varieties, and enables students to build a sense of the community with a shared future for mankind. Besides, passage C of NMET III in 2019, together with passage B of NMET I in 2021 and passage D of new NMET II in 2022, bear witness to the emergence of popular newspapers, the use of the Australian landline, and the civilization process in which human speech accompanied the development of agriculture. Other examples are passage C of NMET III in 2020 and passage D of NMET II in 2022, which introduce the multi-generational culture of the United Kingdom as well as the old and new cultural changes in Sydney. Readers are given a sense of cultural diversity with an open and inclusive sense of international understanding.

3.3.2 Innovation

Innovation is based on labor awareness, problem-solving, and technology application, focusing on hands-on awareness and technological innovation.

As for passage A of NMET II in 2018 and passage A of NMET I in 2019, they enhance students' labor awareness through summer jobs and event promotion participation. These are all reflected on the passage C of NMET I and passage D of NMET II in 2019, together with passage D of new NMET II in 2021 and passage C of NMET I in 2022. The invention of anti-theft keyboards, the creation of robots that can herd cows, and the application of drones to railroads for their escorts are all manifestations of technological innovation. The country's strength makes the starting point of science and technology continue to ramp up, and it is through reading discourse topic that the writers of the NMET guide students to feel the charm of scientific and technological innovation. In addition, passage D of NMET II in 2019 tells about high school students making products for NASA, guiding students to understand the organic connection between technology and human civilization. Passage C of the new NMET II in 2022 solves the problem of using cell phones while driving through text messaging, revealing that students are good at discovering and solving problems.

4. Major Findings

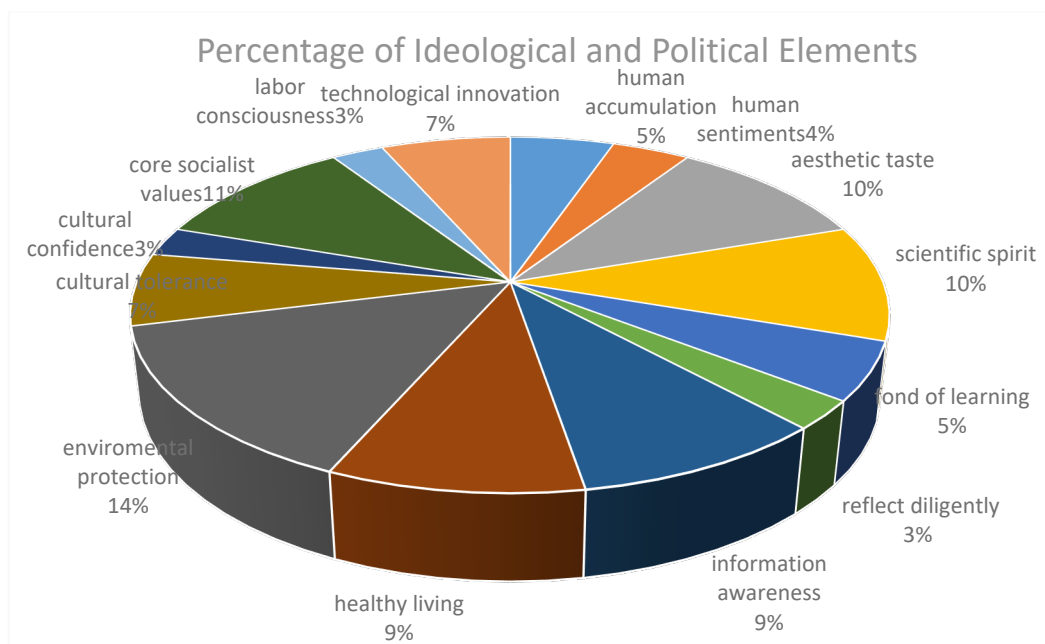


Fig 1: The percentage of ideological and political elements

A chart of the ideological and political elements embodied in the themes of reading comprehension has the following main features.

Firstly, the distribution of core literacy at the three levels needs to be more balanced. However, the themes covered all sub-fields, in line with the requirement of “cultivating socialist builders and successors with all-round development in morality, intelligence, physicality, aesthetics, and labor.” The proportion of “social participation” is the highest (43.42%), followed by “cultural foundation” (30.26%) and finally “independent development” (26.31%). The highest percentage is for “social participation” (43.42%), followed by “cultural foundation” (30.26%) and “autonomous development” (26.31%).

Secondly, animals and environmental protection, socialist core values, aesthetic sentiment, and scientific spirit account for the most. Setters of the NMET pay more attention to cultivating students’ aesthetic education, moral sentiment, and sense of harmony and nature, but slightly less in cultural self-confidence, self-reflection, and labor consciousness. Therefore, the reading materials can incorporate more “Chinese elements” to deepen students’ understanding of China’s excellent traditional culture. At the same time, it strengthens students’ labor awareness and guides teachers to cultivate students’ labor literacy.

5. Conclusion

By integrating the Core Qualities of Chinese Students’ Development, the ideological and political elements behind the reading texts were analyzed through the reading comprehension of the NMET from 2018 to 2022. The results show that the reading topics all embody the element of “ideological and political.” However, the focus of the elaboration is unevenly distributed, with socialist core values and harmonious nature accounting for the highest proportion of the elements. At the same time, cultural self-confidence and labor consciousness need to be given more attention.

According to this result, setters of NMET should integrate the curriculum ideology and politics into English reading text, and at the same time, pay attention to the integration of ideological and political elements of different themes from various angles and in various aspects. They also should focus on guiding the overall development of students’ qualities, thus highlighting the “humanity” of the NMET in English.

The majority of English teachers should strengthen the awareness of curriculum ideology and politic, then integrate knowledge, skills and values into classroom teaching. As users of the NMET, students are expected to understand the cultural connotations and values conveyed behind the words through repeated reading, and to establish a correct worldview, outlook and values in their learning and exploration.

Nevertheless, this study still has some limitations, namely, the sample selected needs to be bigger (2018-2022), and the theme of the concept of curriculum ideological and political needs to be judged over a longer period. However, this study hopes to provide references and lessons for high school exam writers and teachers.

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