

# Integrating Chinese Core Values into Extra-curriculum Activities: A Practice of Themed English Corner

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**Abstract:** *The issue of how to promote the development of core values throughout the curriculum is a frequently mentioned topic that needs further exploration. But few previous studies have investigated the important role extra-curriculum activities play in English learning and education about core values. As such, this paper aims to discuss a feasible path and steps of integrating core values into extra-curriculum activities. Through the analysis on an English corner, it is proposed that the core values should be integrated into the goals of the activity accurately, the content of activity deeply, the process of activity organically, and the assessment of activity naturally, so as to help students' acquire knowledge, capacities and correct values comprehensively.*

**Keywords:** *extra-curriculum activity, Chinese core values, English corner, English learning*

## 1. Introduction

Higher vocational education is an innovative educational mode with Chinese characteristics. It shoulders the responsibilities for cultivating diverse talents, imparting knowledge and skills, and promoting employment and entrepreneurship. It is widely known that the basic issue of education lies in what kind of talents are going to be cultivated, how to cultivate them and for whom they are cultivated. According to a guideline issued by China's Ministry of Education in 2020, the true meaning of cultivating human talents, and a crucial part of it, involves comprehensively promoting the development of core values throughout the curriculum by embedding those values within the transmission of knowledge and the training of skills. As a result, the students can form a correct worldview, a correct outlook on life and correct values. Therefore, since the concept of "courses with the ideological-political elements" being put forward, many studies about teaching activities were carried out in higher vocational schools, aiming to find a way of fusing core values with foreign language teaching and solve the basic issue of education. But what might not receive enough attention is that the guideline also clearly states that the courses with the ideological-political elements should be promoted throughout the whole process of education, with the full use of both classroom teaching and extra-curriculum activities, and consistent explorations on the methods and mechanisms to promote it are needed. Thus, this paper aims to discuss how to integrate Chinese core values into English learning from the perspective of the extra-curriculum activities in the higher vocational colleges.

## 2. Literature review

Classroom teaching refers to the teaching activities carried out in accordance with syllabus. It usually centers on the textbooks and happens at the scheduled time and place. As an effective supplement to the classroom teaching, the extra-curriculum activities, compared with the former one, have the following advantages and characteristics:

Firstly, the time and venue of the extra-curriculum activities are comparatively more flexible. To be specific, the activities can be carried out during students' spare time, and the students can choose the venue based on their needs. Classrooms, playground, library and so on are all available.

Secondly, the form and theme of the extra-curriculum activities are of rich variety. Activities like lectures, competitions, volunteer service, social practice, etc. can stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in learning.

Thirdly, the extra-curriculum activities have no limitation on major and language proficiency level. The activities could be designed specially for the students to suit their major characteristics and English proficiency level. It means that they have more options when attending the activities, which would enhance their initiative to participate in the learning activities.

In spite of these advantages, nowadays, a great number of research still focuses on how to integrate Chinese core values into English courses in higher education. Some of them discussed its functions, significance and implementation strategies. Parts of them calling for the necessity for courses with the ideological-political elements proposed a series of feasible ways to complement it from either macro or micro levels. Some researchers demonstrated their teaching designs to support the feasibility of integrating education about core values into English teaching.

But the number of studies that centering on the extra-curriculum activities carried out in vocational schools is limited. Wang (2022) agreed on that the extra-curriculum activities, with its merits, could be a helper in integrating core values into English teaching and learning [1]. From the macro level, he put forward an overall design with some practical methods and assessment modes. He also gave some advice on how to solve the existing problems during practice. Jiang (2021) took the English dubbing show, English corner, English speech contest and writing contest held by her vocational college as the examples and discussed how to combine those activities with core values, so as to better facilitate English teaching in higher vocational colleges [2]. Similarly, through cases of English speaking contests, prize-winning games and poster design competition, Liu (2022) elaborated on the feasibility and necessity of adding core values into the extra-curriculum activities [3]. However, it is easy to find out that most of these studies are carried out from the macro level like proposing some implementation strategies, and they are lacking in the analyses from the micro level. Besides, their analyses, reflection and summary are basically made on different extra-curriculum activities, rather than focusing on a specific kind of activity. Therefore, with a typical extra-curriculum activity, English corner, as the subject, this research tried to explore how to integrate Chinese core values into extra-curriculum activities in a practical way. In the following part, a series of themed English corner activities that were carried out in a higher vocational school in Guangzhou would be analyzed as the example to better explain the methods and steps from the preparation work to the implementation process.

### **3. How to integrate the core values into the extra-curriculum activity?**

#### ***3.1 Integrate Chinese core values into the goals of activity accurately***

When analyzing the strategies of improving courses with the ideological-political elements in foreign language teaching from the perspective of instructional design, Hu Jiehui (2021) proposed that accuracy in deciding objectives of teaching is primary [4]. By the same token, if we tend to maximize the educational function of the extra-curriculum activities, it is a must for us to set the activity goals and integrate them with the core values accurately. While "accurately" means that those core values in the goals are not randomly selected by the organizers, but should be set after careful analyses on the form of the extra-curriculum activities and the content of the classroom teaching activities associated with them. As an extension and supplement of the classroom teaching activities, the extra-curriculum activities should be able to test the teaching effect of the course through the organization of some practical activities, and at the same time, serve as a "boost" for the enhancement of the curriculum-based core values education. Consequently, the goals of the extra-curriculum activity should connote two aspects: Firstly, to provide students with a stage where they can practice and apply the knowledge learned in the classroom teaching activities; Secondly, to provide students with a chance to gain insight into concepts such as cultivating and practicing socialist core values as well as inheriting and carrying forward fine Chinese traditional culture. Therefore, it is necessary for the organizers to fully understand the form and characteristics of the extra-curriculum activities, and formulate the first-draft of activity goals; then, analyze the teaching objectives of the courses that are closely related to the extra-curriculum activities; after that, make a deep analysis on the teaching objectives and the activity goals, finding out where they share the same core values; finally, integrate those values into the goals.

Take the English corner mentioned above as an example. The theme of the English corner is "Travel around China", so it is obvious that its topics and goals are closely related to core values. Considering that English corner mainly consists of communicative activities, the teaching objectives of basic English speaking course were analyzed and some keywords about the core values were extracted. After combining the two, the activity goals were set as follows:

(1) By participating in the English corner, students can review and apply the expressions learned in English speaking classes on topics such as buying clothes, ordering food, booking hotels, traveling, etc.;

(2) By participating in the English Corner, students can learn some knowledge related to Chinese traditional culture about food, clothing, architecture and places of interests, etc.;

(3) By participating in the English Corner, students can feel the national spirit with patriotism as the core and gain a deeper understanding of the excellent traditional Chinese culture;

(4) By participating in the English Corner, students can improve their hands-on abilities, cultivate their innovation ability, and strengthen their sense to solidarity and cooperation.

### ***3.2 Integrate Chinese core values into the content of activity deeply***

Wen Qiufang (2021) pointed out in the article *A Framework of Integrating Moral Education into College Foreign Language Teaching* that the content chain is the starting point for foreign language teachers to implement courses with the ideological-political elements, and it is also an important point for the moral education [5]. It reveals the importance of the teaching content in the classroom teaching activities. So, it goes without saying that the content of the activity also plays an important role in the extra-curriculum activities. Since the contents should always be in accordance with the goals, it cannot be ignored that the core values in the activity goals should also be integrated into the contents deeply. The word "deeply" means that the organizers should once again analyze the connotations of the core values in the activity goals in depth. And then compare the teaching contents with the activity contents, trying to find out the topics where they overlap but share some differences at the same time. Those are the topics that we could choose as the contents of the activity. In this way, we not only guarantee that the students could learn something different from the course during the activities, but also ensure that they could have a stage where they can apply what they have learned into practice.

For example, two key words related to the core values could be concluded from the goals of the themed English corner above: Chinese traditional culture and national spirit with patriotism as the core. Then, based on the analysis about the English speaking course, we knew that the teaching contents are all dialogues related to some topics about daily life, like ordering food in the restaurant, buying clothing in a shop, booking a hotel and choosing transportation means. Therefore, it would be best if, after participating the activity, the students could gain a better understanding of our Chinese traditional culture related to food, clothing, and travelling while simultaneously their patriotism could be further aroused. To sum up, the topics and contents of the English corner were concluded as the following: This series of English Corners takes "Traveling around China" as the theme, focusing on the special costumes, traditional food, scenic spots, celebrity anecdotes, etc. in the administrative areas of China. Take Guangdong Province as an example. When taking part in the English corner activities, the participants, majority of whom are Cantonese, can share with each other traditional food from various parts of Guangdong. During this process, they can use the expressions about food names and cooking methods learned in the speaking course. And they can also apply the expressions used to make recommendation in a flexible way. This kind of sharing can also naturally arouse students' cultural confidence and national pride. Guangdong's tourist attractions are also a good topic to be discussed during the English corner, for the students have already learned how to make travel plans and recommend attractions to others in the speaking course. Different from the in-class dialogue-making task, students can "travel" freely to various parts of China by exchanging their own travel experiences or future travel plans, through which they can feel the beauty of the great rivers and mountains in China and improve their ability to appreciate the beauty.

### ***3.3 Integrate Chinese core values into the process of activity organically***

It is said that the process of integrating core values into college foreign language teaching should be like that of dissolving the salt in water, which is implicit and organic. Thus, when designing the process of extra-curriculum activities, organizers should also integrate the spirit of responsibility, innovation, dedication, cooperation, etc. into it, so that students can understand the essence of the Chinese core values in practice.

Take English corner as an example again. Traditionally, when holding English corners, the teachers or leaders in the Students' Union are usually responsible for all the preparation work like providing topics, arranging venues and notifying event times, while the only thing that the participants have to do

is to join in the activities willingly and communicate freely. For one thing, in this way, only their improvement on language ability have been paid attention to while the cultivation of their hands-on skills and comprehensive qualities is ignored. For another, most students in higher vocational colleges are not good at speaking English and their proficiency level varies from person to person. Moreover, most of them lack active learning ability and are unwilling to take part in activities. As a result, it is very likely that they would refuse to participate in English corner for fear of having few words to say. In order to increase their enthusiasm and enhance their comprehensive skills, the students should be invited to participate in the whole process of the extra-curriculum activity from the beginning, so that they can design the activities, enjoy themselves and appreciate the core values through practice at the same time.

Adhering to the principle of "students as the main body and teachers as the assistants", when designing the detailed process of the "Travel around China" English Corner, teachers delegated the task to the students and asked them to put forward proposals for the English corner in the unit of a class. Then, after reading the proposals and combining the creative ideas of each class, the teachers finally settled down the activity process. Different from the traditional English corner, "Travel around China" English Corner is made up of two parts:

(1) Keynote speech: Choosing one of the administrative units in China (23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities directly under the Central Government and 2 special administrative regions) as the topic, the keynote speakers are invited to make an introduce of it to the audience centering around its characteristics in terms of food, clothing, architecture, places of interests, etc. After the speech, the audience can raise questions related to the topic and communicate with the speakers. The speakers are selected through self-nomination and they can prepare the speech according to the ideas in their mind, while they can turn to the teachers for help anytime they needed. In this way can the students learn to take the initiative and give full play to their creativity. And through the speech, on the one hand, the keynote speakers can practice their comprehensive language skills; on the other hand, the audience can get a certain amount of language input. This kind of input is essential for it may become the students' source of ideas in the following activities, and bearing some words and expressions in mind can also alleviate their anxiety of having difficulty in communication to some extent.

(2) Language Party: After the keynote speech, the students are invited to take part in various kinds of activities outdoors. There are many booths with delicate decorations and posters at the venue. The participants can wander around and choose the activities they prefer. Those activities are all speaking tasks: some are simple questions; some are impromptu dialogue; and some are guessing games... All of them are related to the contents of keynote speech. Participants can know the specific requirements of the tasks either by reading the posters hanging in front of the booth or talking with the organizers standing behind the booths, who are fully responsible for the activities.

In the traditional English corner, students merely need to participate in the activity at the given time in the arranged venue. Now, they are not only participants, but planners, organizers and executors. They learned cooperation and innovation when writing the proposal, designing the tasks and posters; they understood the significance of responsibility and dedication when organizing the activities together; They enhanced their language and practical skills when participating in these activities. In short, experiencing the whole process is beneficial for them to practice hands-on skills, enhance aesthetic abilities, and cultivate innovative spirit.

### ***3.4 Integrate Chinese core values into the assessment of activity naturally***

Assessment plays a guiding role in the activity and can lead the extra-curriculum activity to the right direction. However, in the process of the extra-curriculum activity, assessment is always the part that is overlooked. For instance, usually, teachers don't make any comments or give any feedback on students' performance during English corner activities. So, students can only judge their performance and make introspection on the basis of their personal feelings. In order to encourage students to actively participate in the extra-curriculum activities and maximize their teaching value, the assessment should be included in the activity with Chinese core values integrated into it. That is to say, it is suggested that students' performance should be assessed throughout the whole process, not only based on their language proficiency level, but also their progress and growth in moral character, cultural spirit, comprehensive abilities, etc. However, if a teacher were invited to evaluate students' performance during the extra-curriculum activities like English corner, students could feel nervous and anxious when participating in the activities. Therefore, when evaluating students' performance, the comments should be made in a natural and implicit way.

In “Travel around China” English corner, the students' performance are mainly assessed in the following two ways:

First, the number of the stamps that they collect during the English corner: It's a kind of peer assessment. As long as students actively participate in the activities, they can get the stamps from the student organizers. The number of stamps they can get depends on the difficulty level of the task and their performance. For example, they may only get one stamp for answering a simple question, and get more than two stamps for role-playing in a situational dialogue. Moreover, it is likely for them to get extra stamps if the organizers deem they complete the task perfectly. Therefore, the number of the stamps, in a way, stands for the points they could get given by the peers. Instead of being disconcerted, they can complete the language tasks in the joyful atmosphere of collecting stamps, in which they also achieve peer assessment and mutual recognition. What's more, with the stamps, participants can go to the prize center and get a lucky draw. Everyone can get a prize, big or little, which is also a reward for their efforts. Owing to this incentive mechanism, some students became more active in activities, and they would like to take part in the activities next time.

Second, the awards they get after the English corner: It's a form of teachers' assessment that is naturally integrated into an award-ceremony. First of all, the representative of the teachers was invited to summarize and comment on the students' performance in designing and planning, organization and cooperation, activity participation, etc. She praised students for what they have done well, and pointed out what could be improved next time, which could provide motivation for the students to do better. Then, all the teachers who provided tutorial guidance and witnessed the students efforts had the chance to vote for the "Best organizers" and "Best participants" in this series of English Corner. And they received a certificate of merit, standing for their excellent performance. In addition, all the organizers and participants got 10 "Decathlon points" (scores used to assess students' comprehensive quality) as a reward for their active participation.

#### 4. Conclusion

Taking the practice in organizing and implementing a series of English corner activities, this paper discusses a feasible path and steps for integrating Chinese core values into extra-curriculum activities and pointed out 4 aspects: First, the core values should be accurately integrated into when setting the goals of the activities; second, when designing the content, more detailed and concrete core values should be integrated; third, the process of activity should also be a carrier of Chinese core values; and fourth, assessment should be fused naturally with the values. Nevertheless, although these steps are summed up from the practice of a typical extra-curriculum activity, that is English Corner, whether they can be applied to other activities still needs to be explored in the future. In addition, even though this paper points out the importance of the assessment in the process of extra-curriculum activities, more in-depth research is still needed in establishing a systematic and standardized assessment system for students' performance in extra-curriculum activities.

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