

Research on the Integration of Project-based Learning and Ideological Education in College English Teaching

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Abstract: Project-based learning, grounded in modern educational theories such as multiple intelligence and constructivism, emphasizes active and personalized learning with students as the primary learners. This aligns well with the inherent rules of second language acquisition. Language courses are closely related to cultural communication, thinking training, and value transmission, making the integration of ideological education into college English teaching appropriate. However, at present, there are scarce researches on college English teaching projects embedded with ideological elements to promote students' language application abilities, value guidance, and comprehensive ability. Through the research on the integration of project-based learning and ideological education, this study focuses on the detailed requirements of college English teachers' teaching abilities, develops a collection of case studies about English projects, establishes a multi-dimensional evaluation system, which strengthens the evaluation of the project implementation process based on the collected data. This approach allows college English courses to achieve the concurrent advancement of "knowledge transmitting, ability cultivation, and value shaping".

Keywords: Project-based Learning; Ideological Education; College English Teaching

1. Research Background

Against the background of modern education reform, there is an urgent need to enhance the foreign language proficiency of high-quality technical and skilled talents. On March 21, 2021, Wu Yan, Director-General of the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education, once mentioned in one of his speeches that foreign language teaching must optimize the professional structure, focus on quality standards, and strengthen value orientation. Foreign language teaching must actively serve the national development strategy, embrace the challenges of the new technological revolution, fully integrate into the construction of modern higher education system, and vigorously cultivate high-quality talents with a global perspective, proficient English, and adeptness in international negotiation and communication. As China's economic development enters a new stage, the adjustment of economic structure and the upgrading of industries are accelerating. The front lines of production and service are in urgent need of high-quality technical talents with both specialized knowledge, language proficiency, high morality and strong adaptability.

Currently, the integration of college English teaching and ideological education is necessary but not satisfactory. College English teachers need to strengthen their awareness of integrating ideological education into their courses and nurturing students' character development. Due to their previous educational experiences, English teachers tend to prioritize the transmission and training of language skills. Some English teachers excessively focus on explaining language knowledge and introducing foreign cultures, neglecting to enhance students' cultural confidence and to cultivate their morality and values. As a result, they fail to bear the responsibility of ideological education in their class. This is mainly caused by teachers' weak ideological awareness as their universities or departments do not provide sufficient opportunities for them to study ideological theories, and they have not been informed of specific requirements. Therefore, it is urgent and necessary for college English teachers to ponder how to blend ideological education into their language teaching effectively and smoothly.

2. Literature Review

Project-based Learning (PBL) was first introduced by the American educator Kilpatrick in 1918, where he first proposed the concept of "project learning" and established the theoretical framework for project-based teaching methods^[1]. Currently, researches on PBL abroad have yielded fruitful results both in theory and practice. In relative researches, the Buck Institute of Education in the United States specializes in project-based teaching through international educational cooperation, defining it as a student-centered bilateral interaction process, in which teachers create situations, guide students and achieve teaching goals. It is a learning mode that collects information, conducts investigations, generates results and evaluates in the form of group cooperation^[2]. At present, the major researches abroad focus on the effectiveness and influencing factors of PBL. Sunyoung Han, a South Korean scholar, studied the performance of students with different levels in participating in STEM+PBL activities and found that students with low performance achieved greater improvement in activities^[3]. PBL was introduced into China in the late 20th century, but attracted the attention of domestic researchers in the 21st century. PBL was first carried out in higher education. For example, Qiang Feng et al. built an evaluation index system of PBL based on curriculum reconstruction to improve the effectiveness and operable ability of evaluation and promote the effective combination of PBL and subject teaching^[4]. Cheng Ju et al. believed that PBL emphasized the exploration of real problems and contextualization and openness, so as to meet the needs of new era^[5].

PBL is widely used in education in China, but compared with foreign countries, relative researches in China are not enough, and the exploration is not deep and comprehensive, especially its application in liberal arts is not extensive. In particular, there are scarce relevant researches in college English courses focusing on the cultivation of students' language application ability, critical thinking and cross-cultural awareness. Therefore, through the research on integrating PBL and ideological education, we analyze college English teachers' comprehensive ability, develop a case set of college English teaching projects, establish a multi-dimensional evaluation system, so that this courses can achieve "knowledge transmitting, ability cultivation and value shaping" simultaneously, which has positive influence on promoting the in-depth development of higher education.

3. Integration of Project-based Learning and Ideological Education in College English Teaching

3.1. Enhance teachers' comprehensive competence and promote teaching capability in ideological education from 5 aspects

Teachers are one of the main participants in the teaching process and play a crucial role in implementing the fundamental task of cultivating students' moral character. Enhancing teachers' comprehensive competence is the key to any reform in higher education. A comprehensive understanding and profound grasp of teachers' ability in ideological education serve as the logical starting point for advancing reforms in college English teaching and the construction of ideological education. This ability involves teachers consciously mining the ideological elements embedded in related courses and organically integrating them into various aspects and stages of college English teaching. It encompasses the individual psychological characteristics and behavioral manifestations demonstrated during the process of knowledge transmission, skill development, and value shaping, possessing characteristics such as generativity, contextualization, and integration. Some research has summarized the essential elements of college English teachers' ability in ideological education from a micro perspective, offering guidance for practical teaching. However, there is a lack of a macro and systematic framework to construct the model of college English teachers' ability in ideological education, leading to an inadequate understanding of the complexity and diversity of teaching competence. Therefore, it is essential to analyze and construct a scientifically systematic recognition of college English teachers' ability in ideological education at a macro level. This model delineates the elements of teachers' ability in ideological education within the college English courses from five dimensions: moral awareness, discipline proficiency, teaching competence, research capability, and global awareness.

To be specific, moral awareness includes being a man of great virtue and good manners, such as respecting and tolerating others, being friendly, helpful, fair, rational, objective, enthusiastic, and persistent in life-long learning, and etc., which emphasizes the importance of being the model or the example in morality for students to follow. Discipline proficiency refers to mastering all the necessary knowledge concerning his or her major and can make full use the textbooks to organize efficient teaching, especially digging out the ideological elements from textbooks or integrating ideological elements into

teaching material skillfully and smoothly. Teaching competence indicates knowing exactly how to make teaching designs, implement teaching process, organize teaching activities, carry out teaching assessment, make reflections and amendments in time and build teaching resource databases when ideological elements are involved. Research ability denotes being familiar with some latest theories and research methods in disciplines related to ideological education, willing to carry out scientific researches and apply those findings in their teaching. Global awareness stresses the importance of tolerance of difference, open-mindedness, cross-cultural awareness and the willingness of engaging in global competition and cooperation under different conditions and so on. The above mentioned five aspects definitely encourage and guide college English teachers to find their way in self-reflection, self-correction and self-perfection in their teaching or research when ideological elements are concerned in their courses.

3.2. Make a collection of case studies for college English teaching projects by integrating ideological education

Drawing on the "Chinese English Language Proficiency Scales" (2018 edition), "Guidelines for University English Teaching" (2020 edition), and "Guidelines for Ideological Education Construction in Higher Education," we adopt the principle of reverse design and forward implementation. Starting from the final outputs of the college English course (language knowledge transmission, skill development, and value shaping), we work backward to establish course objectives. Guided by the objectives of talent cultivation and the curriculum, we thoroughly explore the ideological elements embedded in the course content and conduct a comprehensive analysis in alignment with the college's characteristics and students' traits. Based on this approach, we develop collections of college English teaching projects that incorporate ideological elements. The project themes include but are not limited to the introduction of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, festivals, folk activities and folk tales, wine culture, cuisine culture, regional dialects, Chinese myth, national heroes, comparisons of traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine, comparison of table manners, ways of greetings, time consciousness in eastern and western countries, surveys and analysis of college students' study and consumption attitudes, and other practical projects. All those projects are proposed by students and teacher together, ensuring all the projects involves ideological elements and at the same time can arouse students' interest and promote their participation. Those proposed projects then are divided into several groups based on their subject, category and requirement. Those projects finally are embedded into English courses and set as tasks for students.

By mapping the abilities with the teaching projects, we seamlessly integrate language application skills, inquiry abilities, collaboration skills, and value paradigms into the college English courses. Through the construction of authentic scenarios, we guide learners to actively experience and explore, leading to the meaningful acquisition of knowledge, as those projects must possess characteristics such as scientific rigor, challenge, practicality, contextualization, comprehensiveness, and openness. Different types of projects must have clear teaching objectives, expected outcomes, implementation formats, time-frames, presentation methods, process analyses, evaluation mechanisms, and corresponding teaching management strategies. During the process of completing these teaching projects, students not only achieve language output but also stimulate their autonomy and pro-activity in learning. This approach encourages students to deeply grasp the connotations of value paradigms through active exploration and meaningful experiences.

3.3. Establish a multi-dimensional evaluation system and enhance a diverse-governed quality assessment mechanism

The integration of project-based teaching and ideological education in college English aims to cultivate students' moral character while imparting knowledge and fostering comprehensive abilities. To achieve this, it is essential to construct a evaluation system for the quality of college English teaching that aligns with teaching objectives, content, and modes of instruction. This evaluation system serves as an important approach for assessing and regulating teaching practices and providing feedback. It must adhere to the principles of objectivity, fairness, and transparency, and support, evaluate, supervise, guide, and promote student learning.

This study intends to comprehensively evaluate "teaching by teachers" and "learning by students" from four evaluation perspectives: teacher, students, teaching supervisors, and peer (teacher) review. The evaluation will be conducted through on-line and off-line evaluations, teacher-student discussions, peer evaluations, group discussions, and outcome presentations. It will focus on five dimensions: the rationality of teaching project design, the integration of ideological elements, the project implementation

process, the achievement of students' learning objectives, and overall teaching effectiveness of the project. The result will be a college English teaching evaluation system that incorporates ideological elements (as shown in Table 1), emphasizing process evaluation and also monitoring of the projects' implementing process. The evaluation system only provides major indicators, further researches will focus on assigning appropriate weights to each indicator, and adjusting the overall evaluation scores accordingly. This will ensure the effective evaluation of whole teaching procedure and the continuous optimization of projects' management. The evaluation mechanism will be dynamically incorporated into the entire teaching process, forming a synchronized interaction and dynamic cycle of "participation-evaluation-feedback-adjustment". Based on the evaluation results, corresponding improvement measures will be provided to harness the complementary and upward feedback effects of the multi-dimensional evaluation system. All of the above-mentioned contribute to the development of a diverse-governed quality monitoring mechanism.

Table 1 A project-based college English teaching evaluation system integrated with ideological education

Evaluation subjects	Teacher	Design a scientific evaluation plan and set the evaluation criteria, including process and summary evaluation
	students	Participate in self-assessment, peer (student) assessment, and group assessment
	Teaching supervisors	Evaluate teaching design, teaching management, teaching methods, student engagement, and teaching effectiveness and etc.
	Peer (teacher) review	Evaluate teaching design, teaching methods, teaching content's adaptation, class activities, students' engagement, and effectiveness and etc.
Evaluation contents	Evaluating the rationality of the teaching project design	The appropriateness of the project theme (social phenomenon, history, culture, literature and etc.)
		Project objectives (clear and achievable objectives)
		Project process (clear steps and detailed schedule)
		Research methods (scientific and efficient)
		Project outcome format (speech, written or oral report, paper, works show and etc.)
		Project evaluation methods
	Evaluating the integration of ideological elements	Objectives reflecting ideological elements
		Content incorporating with ideological elements
		Presentation manifesting ideological elements
		Effectiveness demonstrating ideological elements
	Evaluating the project implementation process	Project research approaches (effectiveness)
		Project research steps aligning with the schedule
		Project division of labor (reasonableness)
		Project management (cooperation)
		Project material processing
		Project outcome presentation (wholeness)
		Summary, reflection and refinement
	Evaluating the students' learning achievement of objectives	Knowledge objectives
		Evaluation of skill objectives
		Evaluation of emotional objectives
		Evaluation of value objectives
	Evaluating the overall teaching effectiveness of the project	Self-evaluation (teacher)
		Peer (student) evaluation
		Peer (teacher) evaluation
		Teaching supervisor evaluation
Evaluation methods	On-line and off-line evaluation, teacher-student discussions, peer evaluations, group discussions, outcome presentations, etc.	

4. Summary

To summarize, project-based teaching, guided by constructivism, humanistic educational views, and

postmodern curriculum perspectives, integrates ideological elements to help students apply language into daily use while nurturing their sense of responsibility, spirit of inquiry, innovative spirit, spirit of striving, and patriotic spirit. These qualities are internalized as students' spiritual pursuits and externalized as their voluntary actions. Simultaneously, this initiative fosters students' critical and creative thinking, providing an important approach for experiential insights during value cultivation and promoting differentiated and diversified learning styles. It also enables students to make rational judgments and rational choices in a diverse value environment. Due to the implicit and sustainable nature of the educational function of project-based teaching, the college English courses fulfill the mission of "building moral character." Besides, in the context of high-quality development of the "Belt and Road" initiative, high-quality technical and skilled talents with strong foreign language abilities can better adapt to the employment demands of the global market economy and possess greater environmental adaptability and employability. This study emphasizes the importance of setting up corresponding teaching projects, where students actively discover and resolve problems during the project completion process, engaging in personalized independent research through autonomous or collaborative learning. Through guiding students to complete projects, the teaching approach enhances and strengthens students' comprehensive language application abilities, autonomous learning abilities, analytical abilities, research abilities, collaborative spirit, and cultural literacy, thereby improving students' learning, environmental adaptability, and employability. This approach elevates the quality of talent cultivation, fosters high-quality technical and skilled talents, and provides students with broader career choices and upward mobility opportunities for future academic pursuits and employment.

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