

The Construction of Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education Mechanism for Foreign Language Majors in Chinese Universities

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Abstract: Curriculum-based ideological and political education, a new educational philosophy, has become very popular in teaching and educating students in Chinese universities in recent years. The discipline of foreign languages and literature in the new era faces various challenges, and the foreign language education actively explores the ideal state of foreign language graduates in the new era. Based on the features of the discipline of foreign languages and literature, the ideological and political education in foreign language curriculum aims to achieve the unity of students' professional knowledge, ability, ideological and moral quality, and political quality through the reform in both classroom teaching and teaching material compiling. The curriculum-based political and ideological education mechanism for foreign language majors should be constructed on the basis of the characteristics of the discipline and major, and should be approached from the aspects of educational philosophy, faculty team, curriculum system, teaching methods and evaluation mechanisms.

Keywords: Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education; Ideological and Political Education in Foreign Language Curriculum; The Discipline of Foreign Languages and Literature; The Foreign Language Major

1. Introduction

In recent years, Chinese universities have attached great importance to curriculum-based ideological and political education. General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward the concept of "comprehensive education and all-round education" in 2016, emphasizing that all other courses should "move in the same direction as ideological and political theory courses to achieve synergistic effects." In 2019, he once again emphasized that the reform and innovation of ideological and political courses should adhere to the "eight unifications", which include "the unification of explicit education and implicit education, and the exploration of ideological and political education resources embedded in other courses and teaching methods. In June 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the "Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Curriculum" (hereinafter referred to as the "Guidelines"), which provides specific guidance on the goals, content focus, teaching system, and classroom teaching construction of ideological and political education in professional courses. With the repeated emphasis of national leaders on the alignment of other courses with ideological and political theory courses, and the issuance of the "Guidelines", related teaching practices, competitions, and seminars have been carried out in universities nationwide. Numerous papers, textbooks, teaching plans, and practical guidebooks have been published, covering a wide range of disciplines and professional fields. Using the keyword "课程思政" (curriculum-based ideological and political education), the author conducted a search on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. The first research paper with "课程思政" as the main topic was published in 2017 in China. Since then, the number of papers has been increasing year by year, reaching over 55,000 by July 2023. The disciplinary fields have expanded from economics, political science, journalism, and art in 2007 to covering almost all of the 58 primary disciplines by 2021. The sheer quantity and breadth of these publications are truly impressive.

The development of the discipline of foreign languages and literature in the new era faces various challenges. The integration of ideological and political education into foreign language teaching provides direction and guidance for foreign language majors to reflect on their development process at

a higher level and make self-adjustments. It allows them to showcase their characteristics and highlight their advantages in the new era. Studying the curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors, elucidating its unique connotations from the perspective of the development of the discipline of foreign languages and literature, and exploring the establishment of an educational mechanism that integrates ideological and political education into foreign language curriculum not only helps to facilitate the implementation of the concept of curriculum-based ideological and political education and the spirit of the "Guidelines" issued by the Ministry of Education, but also reveals the particularity, practical value, and theoretical significance of curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors. Furthermore, it helps to clarify and enrich the theory of ideological and political education and promotes the development of foreign language disciplines in the new era. It also paves the way for exploring new ideas in the training mode of foreign language professionals.

2. The Challenges and Missions of Foreign Language Education in the New Era

The current era is experiencing turbulent transformation. In June 2018, General Secretary Xi Jinping declared it as a "profound and complex period unseen in a century" at the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference. The international situation can be described as unpredictable and complicated, judging from a series of international events such as the escalation of climate change, the challenges of economic cycles, the deteriorating China-US trade frictions, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the repeated fluctuations in the North Korean nuclear issue. In 2019, Wu Yan, the Director-General of the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, proposed several new concepts for foreign language education in the new era, such as a new mission, a broader perspective, and the construction of new liberal arts disciplines, during the National Forum on Reform and Development of Foreign Language Education in Higher Education. He pointed out that the cultivation of foreign language talents should be considered from a broader perspective and should be in accordance with the construction of new liberal arts disciplines. In the context of the new era and the new liberal arts disciplines, what challenges does foreign language education confront? What kind of foreign language talents do the country and society need?

The challenges that the foreign language education confronts in the new era can be summarized as follows:

First, the evolving international and domestic situations place higher demands on the language proficiency of foreign language majors. Globalization, industrial revolution, major global transformations, initiatives like the Belt and Road, the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, and the dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation all urgently require foreign language graduates with national language capabilities. The concept of "national language capabilities" was first proposed by American scholars Brechet and Walton in 1993. Chinese scholar Wen Qiufang redefined it and put forward the theory of the three dimensions of national language capabilities: "national language governance capabilities," "national language core capabilities," and "national language strategic capabilities." National language strategic capabilities generally refer to the language proficiency of a nation in handling foreign affairs, and foreign language education is one of its four elements (Wen, 2021).

Accordingly, the role of foreign language education has been redefined in the new era. It is no longer limited to language teaching but is now seen as a strategic activity that contributes to national development. Foreign language education is considered vital to national interests and the country's international competitiveness. It plays a crucial role in promoting national openness, safeguarding national sovereignty, shaping the national image, and enhancing the country's international status. (Cai, 2022) As a result, the demand for foreign language graduates has undergone significant changes in terms of levels and specifications, posing the greatest challenge to foreign language education.

Second, the rapid advancement of technological revolutions directly impacts the content and methods of foreign language education, and the job opportunity of foreign language graduates. With the rapid development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing are widely applied. On the one hand, these emerging technologies are starting to take over some tasks that were traditionally performed by foreign language graduates, such as translation and language teaching. This has led to concerns that "the deployment of AI translators will make foreign language graduates lose their job opportunities." On the other hand, these new technologies and methods have improved students' interest in learning to a certain extent, enhanced

teaching efficiency, reduced the burden on teachers, and addressed issues such as the imbalance of teaching resources and the shortage of qualified teachers in remote areas. The development of foreign language education cannot be separated from these new technologies and methods. How to harness these new technologies and methods to support the talents cultivation of foreign language majors is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed in foreign language education. (Jiang, 2020)

Third, the employment prospects for foreign language graduates have been affected by the expansion of enrollment in universities and the increase ideal state in the number of graduates. Additionally, the return of overseas students with strong language skills has impacted the job market for foreign language graduates. As a result, the employment rate for foreign language graduates has decreased, and the relevance of their employment to their language skills has declined year by year. Many foreign language graduates find themselves working in fields unrelated to language.

The new era presents new requirements and challenges for foreign language education. In response, foreign language education should actively adapt and adjust itself, proactively seek changes, establish new goals and explore the ideal state of its outcomes. In 2019, the "National Standards for Teaching Quality of Foreign Language and Literature Programs" (referred to as the "New National Standards") were promulgated. It stipulates in explicit terms that the aim of the programs is to cultivate talents who possess good comprehensive qualities, solid language proficiency, and specialized knowledge and skills. The talents should also master relevant professional knowledge, play a part in China's foreign exchanges, national and local economic and social development, various foreign-related industries, foreign language education, or academic research fields. (Ministry of Education, 2018)

Specifically, the acquisition of language knowledge, development of language proficiency, and cultivation of intercultural communication abilities are concerned with the competence of the foreign language and literature discipline. Proficiency in modern information technology is a must with the development of social science and technology. Being responsible, having a sense of mission, and contributing to national unity, safeguarding national security, expanding national influence, and meeting the needs of national and local economic and social development are the demands of the times and the inherent purpose of cultivating foreign language talents.

Under the guidance of the "New National Standards", the ideal state of talent cultivation for foreign language majors includes the following aspects: First, possessing correct political integrity and ethical values. Second, mastering the language knowledge of the target country and having the ability to use it effectively. Third, understanding the language of the target country and the culture it carries, as well as understanding the people who use it. Fourth, having sufficient language proficiency in at least one of the six major areas to provide language support for local and national economic and social development. These six major areas are: administrative field (policy-making and implementation, language services in various industries), foreign affairs field, military and security field, news and public opinion field, science and education field, and economic and trade field. Fifth, being proficient in modern information technology related to the language education.

These aspects reflect the comprehensive requirements for foreign language graduates. By meeting these standards, foreign language graduates can contribute effectively to various sectors and meet the needs of the new era.

3. The Connotation and Characteristics of Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education for Foreign Language Majors

The curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors, the discipline of foreign languages and literature, and the ideal state of foreign language graduates in the new era has an inherent logical connection. The attributes and characteristics of the discipline of foreign languages and literature serve as important foundations and guarantees for implementing ideological and political education in foreign language curriculum and achieving the ideal state of foreign language graduates. The ideal state of foreign language graduates is the main goal of curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors and an inevitable requirement for the development of the discipline of foreign languages and literature. Curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors serves as the path and connection point between the discipline of foreign languages and literature, and the ideal state of foreign language graduates.

Language is a tool for human beings to express their thoughts and emotions, communicate information, and transmit culture. (Cai, 2017) Foreign language, first and foremost, is a highly

instrumental discipline, with its instrumental nature manifested in the five skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, as well as specialized purposes in foreign languages. At the same time, the discipline of foreign languages and literature possesses a humanistic nature. It is a form of value education and humanities education, with its focus on guiding students to perceive and understand society and culture, to rationally contemplate the value of life, the meaning of human existence, and the future significance of humanity. The humanistic nature of the discipline of foreign languages and literature indicates that emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence cannot replace foreign language education. Foreign language education is not about teaching translation techniques. It is not measured by physical standards, but rather, it is measured by the uniqueness of human culture and the subtlety of human emotional communication. The scientific nature is the third characteristic of the discipline of foreign languages and literature. It is reflected in its exploration of the inherent laws of language education and the language entity. On the one hand, it involves human spiritual life and the inner world of the mind, and on the other hand, it demonstrates a trend of interdisciplinary integration with other disciplines. The emphasis on critical thinking skills, intercultural communication competence, and international competence, as well as the interdisciplinary research in linguistics (the intersection of language with social sciences or natural sciences), are important manifestations of the scientific nature of the discipline of foreign languages and literature. (Jiang, 2018)

The instrumental nature of the discipline of foreign languages and literature directly refers to the acquisition of language knowledge and skills by foreign language majors. The humanistic nature is connected to the shaping of students' moral values and political character. The scientific aspect involves the mastery of interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, as well as the cultivation of thinking qualities and international competence. Since the characteristics of the discipline of foreign languages and literature have been clarified, and the goals of foreign language education have been identified, it is now crucial to establish a pivot or path that links and integrates the characteristics and the goals together while maintaining the characteristics of the discipline. Only in this way can the high-quality development of foreign language education in the new era be promoted.

The "Guidelines for the Construction of Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions" (hereinafter referred to as the "Guidelines") states that the curriculum-based ideological and political education aims to help shape students' correct worldviews, life philosophies, and values by integrating ideological and political elements in the curriculum. This is not only the inherent purpose of, but also an essential component of talent cultivation. (Ministry of Education, 2020) It follows from this that the curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors is to integrate ideological and political elements into the foreign language curriculum to meet the needs of national, regional, and social development. It involves values guiding, political character shaping, and a correct historical perspective cultivating within the framework of foreign language knowledge impartation and skill development. It organically integrates the talent cultivation of disciplinary literacy, thinking qualities, and political character through the foreign language curriculum. The goal is to cultivate individuals as successors of the socialist cause who are proficient in the language and culture of the target country, capable of telling China's story and spreading China's voice, and contributing to the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors exhibit two characteristics. Firstly, it integrates with the characteristics of the discipline of foreign languages and literature. It does not aim to establish a new disciplinary or create a new curriculum system or a new talent cultivation model. Instead, based on the characteristics of the discipline of foreign languages and literature, it explores and organically integrates ideological and political elements into the existing specialized curriculum system. This is achieved through textbooks, teaching methods, and other approaches.

The publication of the "Understanding Contemporary China" series by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2022 is a typical case of implementing ideological and political education in foreign language curriculum. The series of textbooks covers nine foreign languages and international Chinese, elaborating on China's path, governance, and principles. It enables students to understand the discourse system with Chinese characteristics during their study of foreign languages' core courses, enhances their ability to tell China's story to the international community, and contributes to China's participation in global governance, its promotion of cultural exchange, and its construction of a community with a shared future for humanity. It fully embodies the integration of ideological and political education with the instrumental, scientific, and humanistic characteristics of the foreign language discipline.

Secondly, curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors is in consistence with the ideal state of foreign language graduates. The essence of curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors lies in the pursuit and realization of the comprehensive integration of students' professional knowledge and abilities with their moral and political qualities, through foreign language course teaching and textbook construction. It signifies a change in the educational functional structure, which involves an integration of knowledge impartation, ability cultivation, and values shaping, rather than merely focusing on knowledge acquisition and skill enhancement. The acquisition of foreign language knowledge and the improvement of language proficiency serve as the implementation carriers and primary goals, while the enhancement of interdisciplinary literacy and the forging of political character represent the ultimate objectives. These objectives align with the language proficiency requirements, cultural awareness elements, and essential qualities of thinking that characterize the ideal state of foreign language graduates in the new era.

Therefore, in light of the challenges and new missions of foreign language education in the new era, as well as from the perspectives of the characteristics and development of the discipline of foreign languages and literature, the cultivation of qualified foreign language talents, curriculum-based ideological and political education provides foreign language education directions and pathways to examine its process of development from a higher level and adjust itself to the new situation.

The cultivation of foreign language majors in Chinese universities has gone through three stages: the language skills-oriented stage (1949 to the mid-1980s), the multidisciplinary and cross-cultural stage (mid-1980s to 2010), and the diversified and multi-level stage (2010 to the present). (Hu, 2014) In the first stage, the core element of foreign language talent cultivation was the language proficiency, which emphasized language application abilities. In the second stage, there was an emphasis on cultivating foreign language talents' interdisciplinary abilities such as foreign language + business, foreign language + tourism, and others. In the third stage, there is a call for foreign language majors to return to the discipline itself, emphasizing humanistic education, fostering students' abilities in critical thinking and research, and focusing on cultivating foreign language talents with international perspectives that are needed by the country.

In the third stage, which is the current stage, the adjustment of talent cultivation goals is based on responsibility and commitment, requiring foreign language majors to unleash greater value in upholding national unity, safeguarding national security, and expanding national influence, among other macro strategic aspects. The achievement of this goal should neither deviate from the path of language knowledge and skills, nor be confined to the realm of cultural literacy and interdisciplinary competence, nor be forced into political correctness. Curriculum-based ideological and political education acts as a cohesive agent, effectively connecting these three aspects. Its principles and implementation not only conform to the guiding and permeating nature of ideological and political education, but also reflect the disciplinary characteristics of foreign language majors. It draws on relevant academic achievements from foreign academic circles while considering the current situation in China. It is in line with the characteristics of the foreign language learning environment and showcases the charm of Chinese culture and social development. From a macro perspective, curriculum-based ideological and political education represents an innovation in the development of foreign language disciplines and the practice path to achieve the ideal state of talent cultivation in the new era.

4. The Construction of the Curriculum-based Ideological and Political education Mechanism for Foreign Language Majors

Foreign language education at the tertiary level in the new era not only “relates to the quality of talent cultivation and the exchange and mutual learning between China and other countries, but also relates to China's participation in the reform and construction of the global governance system.” (Wu, 2019) The construction of the curriculum-based ideological and political education mechanism for foreign language majors should start from the characteristics of the discipline and serve the strategic development of the country and local regions. It should be approached from the aspects of educational philosophy, faculty team, curriculum system, teaching methods, evaluation mechanisms, etc.

Firstly, it is necessary to establish a new educational philosophy of nurturing foreign language majors with political integrity and moral virtue. On the one hand, foreign language teachers should quickly transform their educational philosophy, fully recognizing the differences between foreign language teaching and foreign language education. Foreign language teaching attends merely to the

instrumental nature of the discipline of foreign languages and literature, while foreign language education takes also the humanistic and scientific aspects of the discipline into consideration. The teachers should not only emphasize the instrumental nature of the discipline but also value the humanistic and scientific aspects of the discipline. Foreign language education needs to be integrated into the broader education system in China, collaborating with other disciplines to fulfill the fundamental task of cultivating students' moral character. (Wen, 2018) On the other hand, the symbiotic relationship between professional development, national needs, local development, and disciplinary development should be highlighted when the construction of foreign language education program is carried out. It should follow the principles of coordination, cooperation, and mutual benefit. The resources at the institutional, regional, and cross-border levels can be integrated to establish a long-term mechanism. For instance, institutionalized and normalized interactions and cooperations between schools and local communities can be implemented to actively integrate foreign language education into national and local development, to enable foreign language education to serve the local society and gain social support.

Secondly, it is important to establish interdisciplinary communication platforms to create a team of foreign language teachers who understand the significance of integrating ideological and political elements into the curriculum, have a deep comprehension of Chinese culture, are familiar with the discourse system with Chinese characteristics, and are capable of putting curriculum-based ideological and political education into practice. The curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors calls for a redefinition of the role of foreign language teachers. They should not only be educators but also learners, learners who thoroughly comprehend the Party's guiding principles, steadfastly support the principles, and wholeheartedly spread China's narrative. Therefore, it is necessary to optimize foreign language teachers' knowledge structure by equipping them with appropriate knowledge in political science, sociology, journalism, and other relevant disciplines. At the same time, universities should select ideological and political teachers who possess professional theoretical knowledge and rich practical experience, and encourage them to communicate and discuss with foreign language teachers with the purpose of creating a team of instructors who possess both foreign language expertise and ideological and political education competence. This will facilitate the deep integration of ideological and political education into the discipline of foreign languages and literature.

Thirdly, it is important to construct the foreign language curriculum system with the ideological and political characteristics on the basis of the discipline of foreign languages and literature. Language knowledge and disciplinary content are the essence and foundation of the curriculum system with the ideological and political characteristics for foreign language majors. The foreign language curriculum system with the ideological and political characteristics should not be separated from the foreign language curriculum system but should be integrated into it, highlighting the distinctive features of both language discipline and the ideological and political education.

The foreign language majors have its own disciplinary system. It is a primary discipline under the category of literature and is called "the Discipline of Foreign Language and Literature." Instrumentality is just one attribute of this discipline. In March 2017, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council published the "Basic Conditions for Degree Authorization Application (Trial)," which adjusted the discipline of foreign languages and literature into five major disciplinary directions: foreign literature, foreign linguistics and applied linguistics, comparative literature and cross-cultural studies, translation studies, and country and regional studies. This expansion of the knowledge system and academic research areas of the discipline of foreign languages and literature reflects the changing demands for foreign language talents in the country. Under the new disciplinary system, the curriculum system of foreign language majors has also been adjusted accordingly, with the emergence of modules such as country and regional studies, translation and communication, and cross-cultural communication. (Sub-Committee for English Teaching Guidance, 2020) The new professional curriculum system on the basis of the discipline serves as the system and carrier for implementing ideological and political education. In it, it is easier to identify ideological and political elements within the foreign language curriculum and construct a content system for ideological and political education. Moreover, the integration of ideological and political education into professional courses become more practical and substantial, rather than just a formality. (Li, 2021)

Fourthly, it is important to explore diverse teaching methods to guide students to learn actively and absorb actively the socialist core values. Scientific, flexible, and varied teaching methods will help achieve the subtle integration of ideological and political education into foreign language classes. For example, the use of information technology, micro-courses and MOOCs, and cutting-edge technologies

such as VR/AR, 3D, and IR can create dynamic, lively, and inspiring ideological and political foreign language classrooms. Methods such as guided reading and task-driven approaches, which emphasize inquiry-based learning, can encourage students to actively explore the ideological and political elements in their learning materials. Then students can share their learning outcomes as presenters which in return helps to promote their autonomous learning abilities. Methods such as peer teaching, group discussions, and class discussions can encourage students to express their own opinions on ideological and political issues in the textbooks, fostering cooperation and critical thinking skills. Methods such as field trips and on-site teaching can provide students with direct experiences and enrich their perceptual understanding. The internships and practical training bases are ideal places for ideological and political teaching. By employing these diverse teaching methods, students can actively engage with ideological and political education in the foreign language classroom, leading to a more effective integration of the two.

Fifthly, it is necessary to establish a sound evaluation and assessment system of the curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors. The evaluation of curriculum-based ideological and political education for foreign language majors should revolve around teaching needs and teaching effectiveness. It is necessary to assess whether teachers have fully utilized the explicit ideological and political teaching resources in the textbooks and whether they have adequately extracted, explored, and summarized the implicit ideological and political elements in the teaching content. It is also necessary to assess whether teachers have applied these resources and elements in a rational and effective way in their teaching, aligning with the goals of talent cultivation in the specific professional context. Furthermore, comprehensive evaluations of students' psychological qualities and moral qualities should be emphasized. (Xiao, 2020)

5. Conclusion

The new era presents both challenges and opportunities for foreign language education. The establishment and construction of a mechanism to incorporate ideological and political education into the curriculum of foreign language majors is an important task. It serves as a powerful catalyst for seizing opportunities and seeking development in foreign language education.

In the new era, foreign language education faces challenges brought by diversification, globalization, and informatization. With deepening global exchanges and technological advancements, foreign language professionals need to possess broader language proficiency, cross-cultural communication skills, and innovation capabilities. The establishment of a mechanism to incorporate ideological and political education into the curriculum of foreign language majors can help students better understand and respond to these challenges. By integrating ideological and political education into foreign language courses, students not only acquire language knowledge and skills but also cultivate proper values and moral qualities. They will develop international perspectives and global awareness, enabling them to communicate and collaborate effectively in cross-cultural environments and make positive contributions to their country and society.

The establishment of a mechanism to incorporate ideological and political education into the curriculum of foreign language majors can also strengthen students' national identity, civic consciousness, and social responsibility. In the context of globalization, it is particularly important to cultivate foreign language professionals who possess national pride and cultural confidence. Through studying the language and culture of the target country, students can better understand and promote the values and cultural characteristics of that country, thereby enhancing their own sense of national identity. Furthermore, ideological and political education can guide students in developing proper civic consciousness and social responsibility, enabling them to be aware of and capable of contributing to social development and progress.

In summary, the establishment of a mechanism to incorporate ideological and political education into the curriculum of foreign language majors holds great significance in the new era. It can promote the development and upgrading of foreign language majors, cultivating professionals with comprehensive qualities and international competitiveness. Therefore, we should attach importance to the establishment of this mechanism and pave the way for the development of foreign language education.

Acknowledgement

This research is supported by Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project of Guangdong Province, Reserved for Discipline of Foreign Languages (GD21WZX01-06, 2021), the 14th Five-Year Education and Scientific Research Project of Guangdong Society of Education (GDES14067, 2021), Collaborative Education Program for Industry-Academia Cooperation of Chinese Ministry of Education (220600273090903, 2022), and Lingnan Normal University (Teaching Reform Project, 2023).

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