

Principles and Improvement Path of Ideological and Political Education in College English Curriculum

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Abstract: As a discipline of language, college English curriculum contains rich ideological concepts, humanistic spirit, and moral norms. In teaching, it plays an important role in guiding students' values and aligning with ideological and political courses to promote the fundamental task of moral education in higher education institutions. The principles of ideological and political education in college English curriculum should include value-oriented guidance, co-cultivation as the goal, and systematic instructional design for quality assurance. The improvement of college English curriculum in ideological and political education can be achieved through enhancing the ideological and political literacy of college English teachers, optimizing the instructional model, and effectively integrating ideological and political elements into college English textbooks.

Keywords: college English, curriculum ideology and politics, principles, ideological and political elements

1. Introduction

Ideological and political education in college English curriculum plays a pivotal role in shaping students' values, fostering their cultural confidence, and aligning with the broader educational objectives of higher institutions. This article delves into the principles and strategies to enhance ideological and political education within college English courses. It also addresses the challenges faced in this endeavor, emphasizing the need to improve the ideological and political competence of college English teachers, optimize the teaching model, and effectively integrate ideological and political elements into English textbooks.

The National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education in December 2016 pointed out, "Every course needs to maintain a clear channel and fulfill its responsibilities, so that all types of courses align with ideological and political theory courses, creating a synergistic effect." The Guiding Outline for Ideological and Political Construction in Higher Education Curriculum by the Ministry of Education (hereinafter referred to as the "Outline") emphasizes that "comprehensively promoting the construction of curriculum ideology and politics is a strategic measure to implement the fundamental task of moral education." [1] The University English Teaching Guidelines (2020 edition) issued by the Teaching Instruction Committee of University Foreign Language Teaching under the Ministry of Education (hereinafter referred to as the "Teaching Guide") proposes the organic integration of socialist core values into university English teaching content. The teaching of college English courses should actively integrate into the school's curriculum ideological and political education system, thus playing an important role in implementing the fundamental task of moral education in higher education institutions. [2] To comply with the requirements of the Outline, the Teaching Instruction Committee of University Foreign Language Teaching under the Ministry of Education formulated the College Foreign Language Curriculum Ideological and Political Education Guidelines (hereinafter referred to as the "Curriculum Ideological and Political Guidelines") in 2021. The Curriculum Ideological and Political Guidelines provide clear requirements for the ideological and political education goals, teaching content, instructional design, teaching methods, and means in college foreign language courses. [3]

College English, as a compulsory course in higher education, plays an important role in promoting the fundamental task of moral education and nurturing well-rounded individuals. However, there are still some issues that need to be addressed in the ideological and political teaching of college English courses.

2. Insufficient ideological and political competence among college English teachers

2.1 The ideological and political qualities of college English teachers need to be further improved

Although the awareness of integrating ideology and politics into the curriculum has been generally improved among college English teachers, there is still room for improvement in their ideological and political competence. Firstly, many English teachers have a single disciplinary background, mainly focused on foreign language and literature, with solid knowledge of English language and certain understanding of English and American literature. However, some teachers have limited knowledge of excellent Chinese traditional culture due to their long-term focus on English language teaching. As a result, they may struggle to effectively compare and integrate Chinese traditional culture into their teaching, leading to the omission of this valuable cultural heritage and affecting the effectiveness of moral education. Secondly, lacking systematic study of the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and limited interaction with teachers of ideological and political courses, college English teachers often lack the theoretical guidance in ideological and political education. Consequently, they may not fully explore the ideological and political elements embedded in college English teaching or effectively guide students in developing correct perspectives on life, values, and the world. Some teachers may even view ideological and political education as the responsibility of specialized ideological and political course instructors, believing their own role is solely focused on teaching English. This perception falls short of the requirements placed on foreign language teachers in the new era. Therefore, it is crucial to urgently enhance the ideological and political competence of college English teachers.

2.2 The teaching model of ideological and political education in college English courses needs further optimization

Due to the pressure of the College English Test (CET) and students' demand for English for postgraduate entrance exams, traditional college English classrooms often focus more on imparting language knowledge and training language skills, while neglecting the value-oriented function of the curriculum. College English courses possess both instrumental and humanistic characteristics. The instrumental aspect is reflected in the cultivation of students' abilities in English listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation, academic English, professional English, and communication skills for future academic research and career fields. The humanistic aspect is reflected in the cultivation of students' cross-cultural communication abilities, understanding and interpretation of Chinese culture, serving the promotion of Chinese culture to the world, and the ability to tell China's stories in English. The selected texts in college English textbooks cover various topics including society, economy, history, culture, language, ecology, etc., which contain rich ideological and political elements. The teaching of college English should not be limited to language knowledge and skills training alone. To fully realize the value-oriented function of college English courses, scientific and systematic design of ideological and political education in college English courses is needed.

2.3 Inadequate effective integration of ideological and political elements in college English textbooks

Currently, the writing principles and concepts underlying most commonly used college English textbooks in universities are based on the "Teaching Guidelines." Although there are some indications of ideological and political content in these textbooks, they generally follow the model of "language teaching + language training" and focus more on the selection and adaptation of English original texts, with few direct Chinese-language texts included and a lack of integration of Chinese cultural elements. The foreign-themed articles in the textbooks can broaden students' horizons by demonstrating the customs, traditions, and cultures of other countries. However, it is regrettable that many students can introduce foreign cultures well in English but struggle to accurately and appropriately describe Chinese culture in English. [4] Chinese culture is profound and influential, but the lack of Chinese cultural-themed articles in college English textbooks leads to a phenomenon of "lost voice" for Chinese culture, which hinders its promotion to the outside world, impedes the telling of China's stories in English, and hinders mutual exchange and learning between Chinese and Western civilizations. Furthermore, the ideological and political elements "unearthed" from existing college English textbooks are relatively limited and often forced, resulting in a lack of distinctiveness and overlapping with other courses. [5]

3. Principles of Ideological Education in College English Curriculum

3.1 Guided by values

On March 18, 2019, a symposium with teachers of ideological and political theory courses in schools stressed: "Ideological and political theory courses are key courses for implementing the fundamental task of cultivating students' morality and promoting their overall development." "We must unify explicit education and implicit education, tap into the ideological and political education resources contained in other courses and teaching methods, and achieve all-round education for all students throughout the whole process." The college English curriculum must maintain consistency with the ideological and political theory courses and adhere to the principle of being guided by values, fully implementing the fundamental task of cultivating students' morality. The foreign language courses should enable students to strengthen their cultural confidence, respect other civilizations, and have a more vivid and profound understanding of civilization exchanges, mutual learning, and the building of a community with a shared future for humanity. [6]

3.2 Aim for coordinated cultivation

The ideological education in other courses should be consistent with the ideological and political theory courses in terms of political orientation, educational goals, and cultural identity. [7]As an important component of general education in universities, the college English curriculum has a long duration and significant influence on students. Coordinated cultivation in the college English curriculum refers to focusing on the core objectives of the college English curriculum in the design of ideological and political education, ensuring that the knowledge features and value concepts of the college English curriculum remain synchronized; selecting teaching materials and designing teaching materials that incorporate ideological and political elements; achieving consistency between explicit and implicit education in the teaching process, and fostering ideological and political education silently. The Outline states that we should pay attention to nurturing students' ideals and beliefs, fostering patriotism, strengthening moral cultivation, increasing knowledge and insights, and cultivating a spirit of hard work through subtle influence to improve students' comprehensive qualities. [1] The college English curriculum contains rich ideological and political elements and has a long teaching period, making it an ideal course for cultivating students. Therefore, the potential of ideological education in the college English curriculum should be fully explored to achieve synergy with the ideological and political theory courses. Only by establishing a sound and stable mechanism for coordinated cultivation can we integrate value shaping into knowledge impartation and ability development. [8]

3.3 Ensure quality through systematic instructional design

The systematicity of ideological education in the college English curriculum means that the teaching of college English should closely connect all elements and links of the teaching process based on a comprehensive examination of various factors and their relationships, forming an organic whole in education for effective control and guaranteeing the expected outcomes of ideological education in the college English curriculum. The ideological education in the college English curriculum should adhere to student-centeredness, outcome-orientedness, and continuous improvement. It should constantly enhance students' learning experiences and learning outcomes, resolutely guard against superficiality and inconsistency. [1] The college English curriculum mainly consists of three types of courses: general English, specialized English for specific purposes, and intercultural communication. General English courses mainly aim to cultivate students' comprehensive language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, teaching vocabulary, discourse, and pragmatic knowledge, while also cultivating students' scientific and cultural knowledge, promoting them to establish correct worldviews, life philosophies, and values. Specialized English for specific purposes courses mainly aim to develop students' abilities for academic communication and work in English, enhancing their academic and professional qualities. Intercultural communication courses mainly aim to help students understand the differences in worldviews, values, and thinking patterns between China and other countries, fostering their cross-cultural communication abilities. [2] These three types of courses should be promoted in stages, complementing and supporting each other, forming a systematic instructional design, promoting the integration and development of college English, disciplinary majors, and ideological education.

4. Path to Enhance Ideological and Political Education in College English Teaching

4.1 Focus on improving the ideological and political literacy of college English teachers

The key to the success of ideological and political education in college English teaching lies in college English teachers. College English teachers should make efforts to improve their awareness of curriculum ideology and their ability to educate, constantly enhancing their own ideological and political literacy. College English teachers should aim to serve as both a "knowledge teacher" and a "moral teacher" by guiding students with ideas and shaping their values.

Firstly, college English teachers should consciously improve their own ideological and political literacy. This can be achieved through strengthening theoretical study, such as systematically studying the socialist thinking with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and reading extensively on classical Chinese literary works, Chinese society, culture, history, philosophy, and other fields to broaden their knowledge system and apply it flexibly in teaching.

Secondly, college English teachers should accurately grasp the connotation, content, and methods of ideological and political education in college English courses. College English teachers possess their own advantages as they understand both the English language and the diverse cultures behind it. They can cultivate students' analytical and critical thinking skills and help them understand the advantages of Chinese culture, thus strengthening their "cultural confidence." With an increasing number of students studying abroad, college English teachers can also guide students to engage in people-to-people diplomacy in host countries, promoting the spread of Chinese culture and values through the use of English, thereby telling the China story effectively. [9]

Lastly, cultivating problem-awareness is essential. "Problem-oriented" refers to the thinking method of discovering, observing, investigating, analyzing, and solving problems. [10] College English teachers should diligently identify and analyze problems in ideological and political education during college English teaching and find solutions. They should observe and think more in teaching, identifying students' difficulties in comprehension and understanding, actively addressing their ideological confusion, and helping them develop a sense of belonging and significance in college English learning. While teaching Western language and culture, college English teachers should also compare and analyze Chinese language and culture, correcting students' misconceptions and instilling a consciousness of respecting diverse civilizations, thus promoting the formation of a consensus in building a community with a shared future for mankind.

4.2 Vigorously optimize the teaching model for ideological and political education in college English courses

College English teachers should continuously deepen the reform of the teaching model in response to the requirements of the new era, making it better serve higher education and the cultivation of ethical individuals. The "Outline" suggests that college students should receive education on Chinese characteristics of socialism and the Chinese Dream, socialist core values, rule of law, labor education, mental health education, and Chinese excellent traditional culture. [1] College English teachers should conduct research around these contents, broaden their horizons, further strengthen their awareness of education, find the right perspective of education, and enhance their ability to educate.

College English teachers should design a scientifically systematic curriculum for ideological and political education in college English. This includes the design of teaching objectives, teaching content, and teaching methods. In terms of teaching objectives, college English courses should combine value guidance with the development of comprehensive language skills, as well as integrating the instrumental and humanistic aspects of language teaching and the explicit and implicit education of ideology and politics. Regarding teaching content, the integration should be reflected in the selection of teaching materials, the design of teaching unit content, the compilation of teaching plans, the design of classroom activities, and the arrangement of extracurricular activities. As for teaching methods, modern information technology should be fully utilized, adopting a blended teaching approach of both online and offline methods. Platforms such as Chinese university MOOC, U-Campus, and Rain Classroom, as well as English virtual learning communities and distance learning, should be effectively utilized to promote the implementation of ideological and political education activities in college English courses. Moreover, various forms of seminars and discussions on ideological and political education in college English teaching should be conducted. For example, organizing collective lesson preparations, holding open demonstration classes, participating in curriculum ideological and political education

competitions to showcase achievements, establishing teams and virtual research rooms for college English curriculum ideological and political education, constructing a community of college English teachers for curriculum ideological and political education, and continually improving the quality of college English curriculum ideological and political education.

4.3 Effectively incorporating ideological and political elements into university English textbooks

Foreign language textbooks should fully consider situational factors that influence students' identity changes and create foreign language teaching contexts guided by strengthening Chinese cultural identity. [11] University English textbooks are updated relatively slowly, and many aspects of the teaching content do not meet the needs of the teaching. Solving the problem of insufficient "ideological and political elements" in textbooks requires joint efforts from various aspects.

Firstly, textbook writers should conscientiously implement the work deployment of the CPC Central Committee Publicity Department and the Ministry of Education on promoting the comprehensive introduction of The Governance of China in multiple languages into universities, textbooks, and classrooms, and launch a new version of university English textbooks to serve the ideological and political teaching of university English courses. In terms of content selection, more articles on Chinese culture should be arranged, while preserving some authentic English articles. This not only cultivates students' comprehensive language application ability but also cultivates their ability to "tell China's story in English," promoting exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilizations. Currently published ideological and political textbooks for university English courses include "New Era Mingde University English" compiled by the Higher Education Press, "New Edition University English Ideological and Political Course" and the English series "Understanding Contemporary China" compiled by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. These textbooks all contain rich elements of ideological and political education and play an important guiding role in improving students' thinking ability, cross-cultural competence, and international communication ability.

Secondly, university English teachers should explore the "ideological and political elements" in existing university English textbooks, incorporate them into various aspects of university English teaching, and write teaching cases of university English courses with ideological and political education for reference by colleagues, continuously improving the quality of ideological and political education in university English courses. For example, taking Text A "Heroes among us" from the fourth unit of "New Horizon College English, Reading and Writing Course 1 (3rd edition)" compiled by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press as an example, the teacher can explore the idea that heroes come from the people and from ordinary circumstances. The text uses the examples of civilian heroes Daniel Hernandez, Dory Stoddard, and emergency rescue worker Ryan Russell to explain "What makes a hero?". The teacher can guide students to think about "How do you define a hero?" and then introduce some examples of civilian heroes from both Chinese and Western cultures, explaining how ordinary individuals can accomplish extraordinary things in ordinary positions and become respected civilian heroes. This can inspire emotional resonance among students, encourage them to strive to be heroes of the times, and do extraordinary things in ordinary positions, ultimately practicing the hero concept "respecting heroes will produce heroes, and aspiring to be heroes will lead to a succession of heroes".

University academic affairs departments and foreign language departments should actively establish teams to compile teaching materials for university English courses, carefully preparing school-based teaching materials covering general English, specialized English, and intercultural communication courses. These materials include syllabi, teacher's books, lesson plans, study guides, audio and video materials, etc., for teachers and students to use.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, ideological and political education within the college English curriculum is not only a pedagogical necessity but also a critical component of molding well-rounded individuals equipped with strong moral values and cultural awareness. To ensure the success of ideological and political education in college English courses, it is imperative to enhance the ideological and political literacy of college English teachers, optimize the teaching model to strike a balance between language skills and value-oriented education, and effectively incorporate ideological and political elements into English textbooks.

By adhering to the principles of value-oriented guidance, coordinated cultivation, and systematic instructional design, colleges and universities can further strengthen the ideological and political education within their English curriculum. This holistic approach aligns with the overarching goals of moral education in higher education institutions and contributes to the development of ethically responsible global citizens. As we continue to evolve in the new era, the integration of ideology and politics into college English education remains a dynamic and transformative journey, essential for the holistic development of students in today's rapidly changing world.

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