

An Exploration of the Current Teaching State of College English Courses with Ideological-Political Elements and the Blended Teaching Mode

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Abstract: Courses with ideological-political elements are a new direction of the reform of higher education teaching in the new era and a key initiative to implement the fundamental task of “virtue-fostering through education.” College English, as a public basic course in universities, undertakes the dual missions of language teaching and ideological-political education, making it a primary platform for implementing courses with ideological-political elements. Based on the current teaching state of college English courses with ideological-political elements, this paper explores the blended teaching mode of college English courses with ideological-political elements by reconstructing teaching content, innovating teaching methods, integrating online and offline resources, and optimizing the teaching process, focusing on the three stages of pre-class, in-class, and after-class.

Keywords: Courses with ideological-political elements; College English teaching; Blended teaching mode

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1. Introduction

“Courses with ideological-political elements” is an emerging practical initiative in the current reform of higher education and teaching in China. In May 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the *Guidelines for the Construction of Courses with Ideological-Political Elements in Institutions of Higher Learning*, which for the first time proposed to comprehensively advance the construction of courses with ideological-political elements across all colleges and universities, as well as all disciplines and majors in the country. This document emphasizes giving full play to the educational role of every course^[1], which requires breaking the isolation between ideological-political education and other professional education, and reshaping the connotation of disciplines and their educational value. “Foreign language courses with ideological-political elements” refers to the integration of socialist core values into the framework of foreign language and literature. It combines the imparting of language knowledge with ideological-political education, endowing courses with ideological-political elements with richer connotations and extensions. As a result, courses with ideological-political elements are marked with both an international perspective and distinct Chinese characteristics.

In recent years, many scholars have interpreted and defined the connotation of foreign language courses with ideological-political elements from various dimensions. Based on the educational essence of courses with ideological-political elements and the humanities and social sciences attributes of foreign language teaching, Zhang and Wang emphasized that courses with ideological-political elements have a coexisting and complementary relationship with language and cultural knowledge, foreign language communicative competence, foreign language teaching methods, and foreign language teaching abilities ^[2]. From the perspective of classroom teaching practice, Wen interpreted the connotation of foreign language courses with ideological-political elements as: With foreign language teachers as the leading force, the concept of “virtue-fostering through education” is organically integrated into all aspects of foreign language classroom teaching through language teaching content, classroom management, evaluation systems, and teachers’ words and deeds. This initiative is committed to exerting a positive effect on shaping students’ correct world outlook, outlook on life, and values ^[3]. Hu understood the connotation of foreign language courses with ideological-political elements in a top-down manner from three perspectives: national macro educational policies, curriculum theories, and the characteristics of foreign language disciplines. He believes that only when these three perspectives complement and coordinate with each other can they better guide the innovation of teaching design and practice, and promote the in-depth integration of courses with ideological-political elements with language teaching ^[4]. Wang and Huo proposed that foreign language courses with ideological-political elements refer to the integration of the educational concept of “virtue-fostering through education” with explicit and implicit diversified teaching methods in the process of foreign language teaching, with teacher-led and student-centered characteristics ^[5]. Whether the above definitions of the connotation of foreign language courses with ideological-political elements are from the macro top-level design level or the operational definition from the micro level, they all revolve around the fundamental task of “virtue-fostering through education.”

2. Current teaching state of college English courses with ideological-political elements

College English is a crucial component of China’s higher education system and a core course in foreign language education. It is characterized by rich teaching content, a large number of students, substantial class hours, and a long duration of study. As such, it plays an important role in fostering college students’ language proficiency and guiding their value orientations. Owing to its positioning as a “public basic course” and “core general education course,” college English has become a key platform for colleges and universities to implement courses with ideological-political elements. Through classroom observations and teacher interviews, an investigation into college English teaching was conducted at many universities in the city where the author lives. The findings reveal that while progress has been made in integrating ideological-political elements into college English teaching, several issues remain, such as the efforts invested in the construction of courses with ideological-political elements are insufficient, the orientation of ideological-political education is not very prominent, and the paradigm shift from traditional English courses is not thorough enough. These issues are specifically manifested in the following aspects.

2.1. Insufficient awareness and competence of teachers in courses with ideological-political elements

Teachers serve as the designers and implementers of courses with ideological-political elements, playing a

pivotal role in determining whether such education can be effectively imparted and achieve its intended goals. However, some teachers hold a skewed understanding of the connotation of courses with ideological-political elements, equating them with ideological-political courses. Little do they know that the two concepts are entirely different. Ideological-political courses, with “courses” as the core term, refer to ideological-political theory courses centered on “disseminating Marxist theory and the innovative theories of the Communist Party of China (CPC), especially nurturing students with Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”^[6]. In contrast, courses with ideological-political elements is “an educational practice activity that takes courses as the carrier, the ideological-political elements embedded in the knowledge of various disciplines as the entry point, and classroom implementation as the basic approach”^[7]. Essentially, the latter is a concept and a brand-new educational view. Secondly, some English teachers lack robust ideological-political awareness and have a low sense of identification with foreign language courses with ideological-political elements. They perceive ideological-political education as having little relevance to college English courses, viewing it as the sole responsibility of teachers specializing in ideological-political courses. The unique disciplinary characteristics of English further fuel these teachers’ sense of apprehension in practicing courses with ideological-political elements. They take it for granted that it is difficult to explore ideological-political elements in teaching materials and integrate such elements with course content. Furthermore, some teachers, lacking theoretical and practical guidance, mechanically and abruptly transplant or graft the content of ideological-political courses onto English teaching materials, resulting in a teaching effect that is logically disjointed, far-fetched, and overly didactic. Consequently, students develop feelings of weariness or even resentment toward such “patchwork-style” ideological-political education.

2.2. Rigid teaching concepts and models, and imperfect evaluation systems

For a long time, foreign language education in China has prioritized the instrumental nature of language while neglecting its humanistic nature. In terms of English teaching, the improvement of English knowledge and skills remains the core teaching objective. The underlying reason lies in the fact that the traditional college English training goals and classroom teaching models have been deeply rooted in the minds of teachers. Meanwhile, a large proportion of students, aiming to pass various English proficiency tests and admission examinations, such as CET-4, CET-6, TOEFL, IELTS, and postgraduate entrance English exams, expect teachers to focus as much as possible on the training of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation) and the imparting of exam techniques. This also explains why teachers’ teaching content and methods are swayed by exam-oriented education. Furthermore, the singleness of both the evaluation subject and object leads to the absence of an assessment mechanism for ideological-political education outcomes in the current evaluation system. One prominent manifestation of this is that the evaluation of teaching effectiveness still tends to be measured by the pass rates of various English tests. While this curriculum evaluation mechanism that solely relies on examinations as tests and incentives is indeed highly operational and relatively intuitive, and objective, it is disconnected from the current diversified teaching objectives and exhibits an unscientific tendency of “emphasizing the result and overlooking the process.” Rigid teaching concepts and models, imperfect evaluation systems, and exam-oriented learning objectives have significantly hindered the implementation of courses with ideological-political elements in college English and the holistic construction of such education. Even some pioneering English teachers who have consciously integrated the concept of courses with ideological-political elements into their teaching only engage in superficial attempts: their efforts remain confined to a shallow level of ideological-political education, or tend to adopt a cramming-style indoctrination. Such a form of courses with

ideological-political elements can only become a mere formality, remaining at the level of slogans, and failing to truly touch the educational essence of courses with ideological-political elements.

2.3. Westernization of textbook content and low proportion of ideological-political elements

Textbooks serve as a critical carrier of teaching activities, a primary basis for teachers to determine “what to teach” and “how to teach,” and the most direct source for students to acquire knowledge. In addition to instrumental value, textbooks also possess educational value, which lies in cultivating moral character and shaping spiritual beliefs, enlightening wisdom, and enhancing intelligence, and embody the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty. The recent scandal of toxic teaching materials has shocked the whole country and aroused public outrage. This incident is far more than a mere matter of aesthetic taste; more seriously, it is, at its core, a deeply embedded form of cultural infiltration and cultural invasion. Therefore, the development of teaching materials is a matter of national authority, and it bears on the crucial mission of cultivating talent for the Party and the country. Most of the current college English textbooks in China have a strong Western orientation. While adequate basic language training and intake of knowledge about British and American cultures enable many students to talk about various aspects of English-speaking countries in English quite well, they have difficulty telling Chinese stories in English. This one-way input of Western culture has led to a serious imbalance in cultural exchanges between China and the West. If left unaddressed, this trend will inevitably give rise to the phenomenon of “Chinese cultural aphasia” over time. *New Horizon College English: Reading and Writing (3rd Edition)* is taken as an example. The entire set consists of four levels (Levels 1–4), with eight units per level and two articles per unit. The themes of the selected materials are diverse, covering different fields such as society, economy, and culture. However, they are mostly works written by British and American writers or related to Western culture. Behind the English language and words lies the cultural values of English-speaking countries, including history, customs, and religious beliefs. Due to the distinct inherent characteristics of the discipline, English teaching inevitably has to confront foreign ideologies and Western mainstream discourse. If teachers lack the ability to discern linguistic ideologies and identity cultural value orientations^[8], simply adopting a “bringing” principle, it will inevitably affect the effectiveness of talent cultivation, deviating from the original intention of the course with ideological-political elements, and ultimately fail to convey China’s voice, let alone foster cultural confidence and patriotism.

3. Blended English teaching model

In view of the current teaching state of college English courses with ideological-political elements, such as teachers’ insufficient competency, rigid teaching models, and the Westernization of teaching materials, it is urgent to construct a new teaching model that can transcend the temporal and spatial constraints of traditional teaching while organically integrating ideological-political elements. Driven by both the wave of digital education and the development of the “New Liberal Arts” initiative, the blended teaching model, with its multidimensional framework of “online resource expansion + offline in-depth interaction,” offers an innovative solution to address above mentioned predicament. This model reconstructs course content and teaching processes through technological empowerment, innovates teaching methods, and facilitates cross-cultural comparative communication. It not only compensates for the structural shortcomings of teachers’ ideological-political literacy but also breaks the limitations of teaching materials by relying on multi-modal resources. Furthermore, it enables process monitoring of ideological-political teaching with the support

of intelligent evaluation tools, thereby forming a positive ecosystem where the development of language proficiency and the guidance of values proceed in synergy.

Blended teaching follows the teaching process of “online independent inquiry learning before class, offline classroom interactive teaching during class, and internalized knowledge learning after class.” It flexibly adopts a variety of teaching methods, advocates the construction of a learning community with a desire for exploration, and guides students to learn how to learn, reflect, actively participate, and willingly engage in action. Take the text B *Audrey Hepburn—A True Angel in This World* in Unit 2 of *New Horizons College English 3: Reading and Writing (4th Edition)* as an example. The language teaching objective is to narrate the legendary and torturous life of Audrey Hepburn, while the objective of ideological-political education is to introduce China’s thoughts and theories on humanitarianism and enhance students’ humanitarian spirit. The specific teaching process is as follows:

Pre-class online independent inquiry phrase: Relying on Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) Unipus Smart Cloud Platform and the English class QQ group, teachers push a learning resource package related to the theme of the text one week in advance, clarify the output tasks, allowing students to do some preliminary exploration. At the language level, students master core vocabulary such as “humanitarian,” “ambassador,” “compassionate,” and “cherish” through micro-courses on vocabulary. At the cultural level, students watch documentaries about Audrey Hepburn’s life, official promotional videos of the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and graphic materials on the historical development of the Academy Awards, so as to construct the cultural background knowledge of the discourse.

During-class offline interactive phase: The classroom teaching adopts a “three-stage and nine-link” design, which reflects the systematic and progressive nature of the teaching activities, with a total duration of 120 minutes.

(1) Stage One: Text Deconstruction (40 minutes)

Text structure analysis: Students work in groups to draw a mind map of the text and analyze the spatio-temporal narrative structure of the biographical text.

Appreciation of language features: Focus on typical sentence patterns such as “Her lifelong passion for helping those in need found its greatest calling” and “She believed deeply in the ideology that all people share in the duty to care for those in need.” Practice sentence imitation exercises in combination with the English expression “a community with a shared future for mankind.”

Application of ideological-political vocabularies: Take key words or phrases in the text, such as “alleviate” and “be deprived of,” as examples. Students are guided to restructure sentences by connecting them with CPC and government terms or policies like “poverty alleviation” and “educational equity,” thereby deepening students’ comprehension.

(2) Stage Two: Value Exploration (40 minutes)

Character analysis: Students watch a video about the exemplary deeds of Zhang Guimei, a “role model of the times.” A parallel discussion on Hepburn’s elegance and tenacity, as well as Zhang Guimei’s spirit of dedication, is conducted, guiding students to appreciate the personal charisma of both figures and then engage in deep critical thinking on the topic of “the ordinary versus the great.”

Dialogue between Chinese and Western thoughts: Explain humanitarian ideas and doctrines such as the Confucian concept of “benevolence” and the Mohist principle of “universal love” in the form of a Chinese-English comparison. This aims to cultivate students’ ability to understand and interpret traditional Chinese culture, thereby enhancing their cultural confidence.

Discussion on current political hotspots: Students are guided to think critically about the controversial incident of Japan's nuclear wastewater discharge, and then use English to deconstruct Western discourse hegemony, which aims to develop their ability to express China's stance in global discourse.

(3) Stage Three: Creative Output (40 minutes)

Biography writing guidance: Analyze the application techniques of timeline clues in celebrity biographies.

Scenario simulation and practice: Students work in groups to perform a role-play of an "Interview with Hepburn," integrating elements of Chinese philanthropy stories into the performance.

Instant in-class evaluation: Push a "Language & Ideological-Political" dual-dimensional rating scale via Rain Classroom to assess the teaching effectiveness.

Post-class consolidation and improvement phase: Students independently complete the textbook exercises, as well as translation and writing assignments aligned with the unit theme posted by the teacher on the Unipus and iWrite platforms, strengthening the internalization and absorption of knowledge. To expand and extend extracurricular activities, deepen ideological-political literacy, students work in groups, clarify their division of tasks, and select the deeds of heroes, great figures, or ordinary people to make English PPTs in their spare time, then deliver a class presentation in the next class.

Empowered by technology, the blended teaching model effectively compensates for the limitations of traditional classrooms. Pre-class online independent learning provides students with rich ideological-political contextual input, while in-class offline in-depth interactions strengthen students' critical thinking and cross-cultural comparative abilities through task-driven activities. Post-class extended practice further consolidates language application and value internalization. Take the teaching of *Audrey Hepburn—A True Angel in This World* as an example, this model not only improves students' language expression skills, but also enhances their cultural confidence and global sense of responsibility through the comparison of Chinese and Western humanitarian spirits and the critical discussion of current political issues. Ultimately, it achieves the effect of courses with ideological-political elements in a subtle and imperceptible way.

4. Conclusion

College English courses with ideological-political elements are not only an inevitable requirement for language teaching to return to its educational essence of nurturing people, but also the value orientation of the era. In the context of globalization, it serves to spread China's voice, consolidate the foundation of cultural confidence, and cultivate a new generation of foreign language talents who possess both an international perspective and a sense of national identity. Based on the current teaching state of college English courses with ideological-political elements, this study reconstructs teaching content by organically integrating ideological-political elements, innovates teaching methods to stimulate students' subjectivity, and optimizes online and offline resources. Focusing on the three phases: pre-class guidance on learning for inspiring thinking, in-class in-depth exploration, and post-class extended practice, a closed-loop blended teaching practice path has been constructed with clear objectives, structured processes, and diversified evaluations. This enables the cultivation of language ability and value guidance to achieve resonance in the new teaching ecosystem of spatio-temporal extension, resource integration, and teacher-student interaction. It is important to note that courses with ideological-political elements are a long-term and systematic project. College English also needs to form a synergy with other disciplines to jointly advance the process of courses with ideological-political elements.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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