

Theoretical and Practical Exploration of Ideology and Politics in British and American Literature Curriculum

Wei He*, Qin He

School of Foreign Languages, Xiangtan Institute of Technology, Xiangtan 411100, Hunan Province, China

*Corresponding author: Wei He, vivianlolli@126.com

Copyright: © 2023 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: British and American literature is the essence of culture and civilization created in the long historical development process and a bright pearl in the treasure house of world literature. Different types of civilization history, ideological history, and values can better help students understand the literary quality and ideology in various periods of Western civilization. Studying British and American literature aids students in using cross-cultural perspectives to distinguish Chinese and foreign literature and culture. Therefore, the ideological and political tasks of the curriculum are particularly prominent. This research takes a fragment of selected British and American literature as an example to analyze the paths and methods of ideological and political coordination between British and American literature and curriculum, and to explore new ways of educating students in colleges and universities using British and American literature in the new era.

Keywords: British and American literature; Integration of ideology and politics into courses; New teaching methods

Online publication: December 25, 2023

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In 2018, the National Standards for Teaching Quality of Foreign Languages and Literature (hereafter referred to as “National Standards”) was issued, pointing out that foreign language talents should possess both humanistic and instrumental characteristics ^[1]. Hu Wenzhong and Sun Youzhong advocated that foreign language teaching should reflect the subject’s characteristics and strengthen students’ humanistic education. Zhang Xiping pointed out that the essence of foreign language and education should emphasize humanistic education. Zha pointed out that the English major is not a pure English major but a major that uses English as a guide to learn knowledge related to the humanities field to cultivate high-quality talents.

1.2. Research status

Professor Jiang Chengyong of Zhejiang Gongshang University took the production of Massive Open Online

Courses (MOOCs) Appreciation of Western Literary Classics as an example. He focused on integrating open online courses and university general education to enrich teaching methods and strengthen ideological and political construction in general education courses. Professor Shi Jian from Sichuan University emphasized that foreign language teaching should consider training students' basic language skills and the practical, humanistic, and international nature of language to enhance the cultivation of students' comprehensive quality. Professor Dong Hongchuan of Sichuan International Studies University is committed to the ideological and political construction of translation courses for foreign language majors in colleges and universities in the new era. Using an online education resource platform, he reconstructed the teaching system of translation courses. He improved the training and assessment system of translation ideological and political courses for students and teachers. Professor Liu Jianjun from Shanghai Jiao Tong University proposed new thoughts on foreign literature from the perspective of new liberal arts. He advocated the renewal of teaching reform, proposed the integration of new liberal arts with other knowledge, and the joint cultivation and development of teachers' and students' abilities by establishing and reorganizing knowledge systems and updating teaching methods. Chen Xinren, a professor at Nanjing University, focused on the guiding role of ideology and politics in compiling English textbooks for cross-cultural communication. He pointed out that different cultures should be reflected in the compilation of textbooks, and the position of China should be reflected in the integration of ideological and political elements in textbooks. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of moral development, aiming to cultivate Chinese youth with a strong sense of patriotic sentiments, national identity, and cultural confidence in the new era.

Professor Wang Lan of Shanghai International Studies University focused on the ideological and political practice in foreign language teaching. She suggested that foreign language teaching should consider invisible and explicit education. Taking the new version of Advanced College English as an example, she explored the integration of ideological and political teaching design and analyzed the invisible education of textbooks. Professor Zhou Min from Hangzhou Normal University analyzed various inequalities and hegemonic politics that may be rife in the communication of Western culture from the story that the British and American media deliberately defamed the images of six Chinese survivors in the sinking of Titanic in 1912. She emphasized that while teaching foreign literature courses, the works' artistic features and functions should be focused on. Teachers should guide students to discover the deep meaning of artistic works and adhere to the correct ideological and moral stance ^[2]. Professor Xiao Weiqing from Shanghai International Studies University analyzed upgrading curriculum ideology and politics from version 1.0 to version 2.0 in developing the translation major. He emphasized that the overall planning and promotion of curriculum ideology and politics should be strengthened in practical courses, the spirit of the times and historical inheritance should be combined, and the humanistic quality, international vision, and professional ethics of young people should be cultivated in the new era.

Experts and scholars focused on the connotation, principles, and objectives of ideological and political education and general education in foreign language courses, and the integration of ideological and political elements in teaching, and explored the problems existing in teachers' curriculum construction and the use of textbooks and their solutions. This paper combines the macro interpretation of the predecessors on subject construction and talent training under the background of new liberal arts, focuses on the integration of selected readings of British and American literature, a professional course for English majors in colleges and universities, and the ideological and political elements in the curriculum and textbooks, in order to help teachers improve their teaching skills and enhance their ideological and political awareness in the curriculum.

2. Overview of British and American literature and curriculum ideology and politics

The textbook “Selected Readings of British and American Literature” contains many classic works of excellent writers, covering different periods and social features. The themes of the works include friendship, family, love, death, and other aspects reflecting social class, ethics, morality, emotion, and adventure. Furthermore, combined with the socialist road with Chinese characteristics, when students read the selected works, they resonate with the works and authors who share the same values, thus further cultivating young people with positive personalities.

2.1. British and American literature

As a compulsory course for English majors in colleges and universities, British and American literature aims to enrich the accumulation of language knowledge for English majors and understand the process of British and American history in different periods, as well as the vivid power and emotional accumulation displayed by literary works. Different types of history of civilization and history of ideas can better help students understand the historical process. British and American countries’ literary attainment and ideology in different periods aid students in discriminating between Chinese and foreign literature and culture from a cross-cultural perspective.

British and American literature has developed into independent national literature with solid vitality in the long historical development process. As compulsory courses for English majors in college education, liberal arts courses include Western culture, history, philosophy, art, religious thought, and other contents, covering most college English majors or business English majors. According to the English Teaching Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities ^[1], the course of British and American literature aims to cultivate students’ comprehensive quality and ability to read, appreciate, and understand original English literature and master the essential quality of critical literary works, promote students’ primary language skills and humanistic quality through reading and analyzing British literary works, and enhance students’ understanding of Western literature.

2.2. Curriculum ideology and politics

For English majors in colleges and universities, the integration of curriculum ideology and politics aims to jointly cultivate new youth with the overall development of morality, intelligence, and physical fitness. This thought provides the direction and comprehensive guidance for the education process of colleges and universities in the new era. It puts forward the concept and mode of “educating all personnel, educating all processes, and educating all aspects,” and emphasizes and implements the concept and mode of “educating all three aspects.”

3. Problems in the teaching of British and American literature

As a carrier of cultural integration, curriculum ideology and politics aim to integrate the thoughts and connotations of different types of courses into different links of the course in a purposeful, oriented, and content manner. Through various formats, such as introductions, questions, discussions, and story sharing, different types of values and ideologies are conveyed. Ideological and political education is an education hotspot in the new liberal arts era in China. Scholars of various disciplines engage in “moral education” consecutively. The integration of British and American literature curricula and ideological and political education has also become a turning point for scholars in the field of English to reform the teaching mode.

3.1. Lack of improvement of critical thinking skill

The “three-in-one education” involves the ideological and political education carried out in colleges and universities under the background of the new era, which is conducive to comprehensively improving the personal quality of college students. Promoting college education to achieve the fundamental goal of “cultivating morality and educating people” should be based on implementing the national education policy and providing correct direction guidance and value orientation for the ideological and political construction of college courses [3]. However, under the current situation, there are still a series of challenges in integrating curriculum ideology and politics with university classrooms.

Foreign language education is responsible for various ideological positions and viewpoints, so it cannot simply state the foreign culture, thoughts, and viewpoints presented in the text. When students accept new knowledge, they must go through the cognitive process of “from simple to complex, from shallow to deep.” Some teachers, who require help in understanding students’ abilities, may deviate from the designated teaching design and logic, choosing to talk about topics they feel comfortable with without providing sufficient explanations. In addition, some teachers read entirely from the book, wasting a lot of time and energy explaining the words and syntax in literary works, which fails to achieve the ideal teaching effect. As for the British and American literature course, teachers should help students establish a correct stance and belief when interpreting literary works, teach students according to their aptitude, and help them read classical literary works independently, such as *The Great Gatsby*.

In the British and American literature selection textbooks, excerpts of the novel are appreciated. Suppose the full text is not known, while reading, some students are easily attracted by Gatsby’s luxurious life and the high-class reveling and drinking, ignore the protagonist’s lonely heart and tragic ending, and fail to understand the real purpose of educating people using this classic novel.

3.2. Lack of professional teachers

As a compulsory course for English majors in college, British and American literature should be taught by teachers with profound literary accomplishments and strong scientific research skills. Teachers should be able to combine literary theories and teaching frontiers to guide students to independently analyze the works and study literary works of different periods. However, when introducing and training foreign language professionals, some universities mainly select talents based on the comprehensive skills of foreign language majors and require more professional teachers who have an in-depth study of British and American literature.

Teachers of professional courses in colleges and universities have rich professional knowledge and strong scientific research skills. However, some colleges and universities only provide ideological and political course training for some teachers, resulting in a gap in understanding ideological and political ideas between the teaching staff. Thus, organic integration and innovation of ideological, political, and professional courses in classroom practice are necessary [4]. Colleges and universities have yet to design different education methods according to the characteristics of various courses. Teachers are unable to carry out unique education methods for students according to the actual teaching situation in the classroom. Some teachers of specialized courses plagiarize the content of ideological and political education and require a deeper understanding of the integration of professional courses and curriculum ideological and political education. They struggle to align the courses with students’ everyday life, which can evoke resistance and restrict the development of educational courses.

3.3. Lack of reasonable curriculum design

To carry out ideological and political education in colleges and universities, teachers are required to integrate

ideological and political elements into the curriculum. Some teachers of specialized courses need more teaching ideas on the in-depth understanding of ideological and political elements in the curriculum. In order to cope with the inspection of school education activities, they unilaterally integrate the idea of “cultivating morality and cultivating people” into the teaching process. The curriculum design must include integrating foreign culture and local literature.

Teachers choose relatively complex texts or unfamiliar content from the introduction of the classroom for discussion, and there are some unfavorable phenomena such as dealing with and going through the motions. Teachers and students can only deepen the nature of ideological and political education in the course, but the ideal teaching effect cannot be reached due to the uneven foundation of students, which may cause some students to lose confidence. At the same time, the lack of ideological and political elements in teachers’ teaching causes students unable to truly grasp the core of the literature curriculum committed to cultivating humanism and humanistic spirit.

4. Collaborative strategies of British and American literature practice and curriculum ideology and politics under the background of new liberal arts

Professor Wang Shouren firmly stated, “In terms of major English teaching, the problem is not whether to offer an English literature course, but what to teach and how to teach.” Moreover, it was stressed that as an indispensable compulsory course in the talent training system of colleges and universities, British and American literature is important for students to understand the world’s traditional culture and civilization.

As an essential carrier of British and American literature courses, the integration process aims to improve the quality of British and American literature courses in colleges and universities rather than completely subvert the nature and content of the courses. The teaching status and research prospects of British and American literature could be more optimistic. They mainly focus on the input of literary knowledge and the transmission of traditional culture and lack the integration of “moral education” and “three-round education.” Due to the problems arising from the integration of professional courses and ideological and political teaching in practical teaching, this study proposes solutions from the following aspects.

4.1. Reforming the teaching methods of British and American literature courses

Firstly, British and American literature needs to reset the goal of innovation. Teachers and students fully cooperate in the classroom to complete the new model of 3M: Message, Medium, and Method, which means explicitly that content, technology, and method should be satisfied simultaneously in course teaching to increase teaching efficiency. Content refers to the importance attached to the meaning of selected passages in daily teaching and the in-depth understanding of the core views that the author wants to express in a specific period^[5]. In the traditional mode, they were teaching British and American literary works that mainly emphasized understanding the text word by word. It requires thinking profoundly about the author’s background and the microcosmic world reflected in the works. Teaching innovation refers to emphasizing abandoning the traditional teacher-centered teaching mode.

Teachers can adopt the online and offline mixed teaching mode and utilize the abundant online video resources, animation, and dubbing forms to attract students’ attention and enrich the classroom teaching forms. For example, simulating dubbing for *Pride and Prejudice* can spark students’ interest in reading the original work. Teachers fully mobilize students’ enthusiasm for independent learning and group discussion in class and carry out horizontal or vertical discussions on various works in different periods. It is necessary to properly integrate the ideological and political elements of the course, summarize the different types of

education methods presented by the author in the works, integrate the ideological and political viewpoints of the course into the class, and abandon the traditional teaching method of the entire hall. Students should be led to constantly explore the stories behind the works and authors, in order to stimulate their emotions and further improve the new classroom teaching model.

Francis Bacon, in *Novum Organum*, talked about applying scientific ideas to things. When students read the sentence “and not to defeat an opponent in argument but to conquer nature by action,” they can experience that knowledge and courage are required to explore the natural world. At the same time, the sentence “we do not need to give men’s understanding wings, but rather lead and weights, to check every leap and flight” emphasizes that correct and positive ideas need constant exploration and reasoning through scientific methods to gain the recognition of the majority of people. Therefore, combining literary works and ideological and political education also helps students break through the shackles of traditional thoughts when reading classical literature.

4.2. Optimizing the assessment mechanism of British and American literature courses

Additionally, teachers need to optimize the course assessment mechanism. Students cannot quantify knowledge and integrate ideological and political elements into their appreciation of British and American literary works. Therefore, teachers should innovate the basic knowledge level of words, phrases, key sentences, and other subjects of the selected works in the assessment, guiding students to form a frame-like learning mindset. Moreover, the literary forms presented by literary works in different periods are viewed from the overall development perspective. The framework structure is used to assess the values and educational connotation presented by the works, and English teaching and ideological and political education are integrated at all levels.

In *Freedom*, author Jonathan Franz focused on British and American literature and history from the 19th century to the early 21st century. Readers follow the author’s interpretation of the story, one of the quote from the book is “You may be poor, but the one thing nobody can take away from you is the freedom to fuck up your life whatever way you want to.” While reading, readers continuously contemplate the theme of freedom and how to attain it. This process prompts a reevaluation of inner desires, fostering a deeper experience and pursuit of life. Another example in Shakespeare’s play Hamlet is the opening phrase of a speech “To be, or not to be – that is the question.” For those who have suffered through life, the answer is always there. As a motto, it is easy to trigger college students’ unconscious and unintentional understanding and memory of classical literature, which is better than the memorizing effect of repeatedly comparing Chinese and English.

4.3. Invisible education of curriculum ideology and politics

Wordsworth famously defined poetry in the preface to his 1802 collection: “Good poetry is the natural flow of strong feelings. He regards nature as a source of inspiration, whose beauty gives strength and pleasure, and purifies and elevates the poet’s mind.”

Traditional British and American literature classes integrate ideological and political ideas into the curriculum to strengthen students’ new understanding of Western literature while strengthening young students’ identification with socialist core values. However, the ideological construction process is too symbolic and lacks internal research on literary works^[6]. Some college students require a strong English foundation, leading to potential differences in their approach to reading classic literature.

Given the need for improvement in the teaching process of British and American literature courses, college teachers can innovate traditional teaching methods by adopting the 3M teaching model, combining online and offline teaching, and utilizing advanced new media technology to enrich the classroom teaching mode.

Secondly, teachers should deeply explore the knowledge and literary quality of British and American literature, highlight the correct ideological value and spiritual connotation of classic works in the reform process, enrich the interest in classroom teaching, and comprehensively cultivate students' humanity. Lastly, ideological and political education elements should be consciously incorporated into the teaching process, and the value of invisible ideological and political education in the curriculum should be actively considered.

5. Conclusion

The ideological and political construction of the college curriculum stipulates that all courses, including those related to foreign literature, should clarify the ideological and political functions and conform to the development trend of talent training. Moreover, conforming to the developmental principles of ideological and political work can reflect the historical mission of colleges and universities in cultivating talents in an all-round way in the new era. In English teaching with British and American literary works as the carrier, ideological and political ideas of the course should be integrated into the formulation of the teaching syllabus, the setting of teaching plans, and the implementation of the teaching process.

Students should improve their essential English listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation skills by relying on classical literary works. Meanwhile, students should have specific writing skills and literary aesthetics to appreciate classical works. On the other hand, college teachers apply the 3M model to help students appreciate British and American literary works and improve students' cross-cultural awareness and communicative ability. Furthermore, it also helps students form critical thinking skills, learn from each other, and cultivate a positive outlook on life and values.

The construction of "double first-class" universities indicates the arrival of the era of China's higher education power construction. Foreign language and literature disciplines should develop in tandem. In contrast, British and American literature conforms to the general trend. It actively adjusts its primary settings and curriculum syllabuses to cultivate foreign language talents to meet the requirements of the new era^[7]. A new teaching structure of British and American literature should be constructed, and attention should be paid to the cultivation of ideological values, the improvement of basic language skills, and the cultivation of the critical thinking skills of students and teachers in teaching^[8].

It is necessary to guide students to deeply understand the core socialist values in combination with professional knowledge education and conscientiously carry forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture. The foreign language discipline can only achieve healthy and long-term development by adhering to humanistic attributes.

Funding

"2022 Research Project of Xiangtan Institute of Technology's School-Level Education and Teaching Reform" (Project number: XTLG2022B034)

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Wang D, 2020, Strategies for Enhancing the Comprehensive Qualities of Non-Common Language Major Students: Reflections on the “National Standard for the Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Foreign Language and Literature Majors.” *Language Education*, 8(1): 2–7 + 39.
- [2] He YH, Liu Q, 2021, Adhere to Moral Education and Cultivate People, Integrate Foreign Language Curriculum Ideological and Political Education with General Education -- A Review of “Academic Forum on Ideological and Political Education and General Education of Foreign Language Curriculum in Colleges and Universities Under the Background of New Liberal Arts.” *Technology Enhanced Foreign Languages*, 2021(2): 119–120.
- [3] Zhang FC, Wu ZH, Research on Ideological and Political Construction of College Curriculum from the Perspective of “Three Whole Education.” *Journal of Social Sciences*, 2022(4): 265–270.
- [4] Qing CH, 2021, Research on the Integration of British and American Literature Teaching and Curriculum Ideology and Politics Under the Background of New Liberal Arts. *Overseas English*, 2021(20): 163–164.
- [5] Tang YJ, 2021, Research on the Teaching Reform of British and American Literature Under the Concept of Ideological and Political Education. *Overseas English*, 2021(23): 254–255.
- [6] Yu R, Zhu XY, 2021, The Exploration of the New Modes of Foreign Literature Teaching in the Ideological and Political Context of Curriculum. *Foreign Language Learning Theory and Practice*, 2021(20): 163–164.
- [7] Zeng YY, 2019, On the Interdisciplinary Development Path of Foreign Language and Literature in the New Era. *Foreign Language World*, 2019(1): 31–37.
- [8] Wang H, Yang JC, 2021, Theoretical Thinking and Practical Exploration of Ideological and Political Thinking in Foreign Literature Curriculum. *Foreign Language Research*, 2021(6): 71–77.

Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.