An Exploration of Ideological and Political Education in College English Courses

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Abstract. This paper delves into the theoretical foundation and practical implementation of ideological and political education (IPE) within college English classrooms. Initially, it defines IPE and highlights its critical role in the fundamental educational task of cultivating virtue and character. The paper then outlines the specific requirements and principles necessary for integrating IPE into college English courses. The study underscores that beyond enhancing students' language proficiency, college English courses should also foster students' social responsibility, academic integrity, and scientific ethics through implicit teaching methods. By improving teachers' IPE teaching capabilities, deeply integrating IPE elements into course content, and utilizing modern information technology to innovate teaching methods, the paper proposes effective strategies to achieve IPE goals. The integration of IPE in college English courses holds substantial theoretical and practical importance, particularly in the context of the new era, and it actively promotes higher education teaching reform. This comprehensive approach ensures that students not only gain linguistic skills but also develop a strong ethical foundation and a sense of social responsibility, thereby aligning with the broader educational objectives of fostering well-rounded individuals.

Keywords: college English, teacher's capability enhancement, Ideological and Political Education (IPE), social responsibility, higher education reform

1. Introduction

From the time of Han Yu in the Tang Dynasty, who declared that teachers serve to propagate teachings, impart professional knowledge, and dispel doubts, to the widely embraced notion of teachers being the "engineers of the human soul," and extending to the reiterated emphasis by the Central Committee on moral education as the fundamental mission of education, it is evident that teachers shoulder the profound responsibility of guiding and nurturing students. The concept of "curriculum-based ideological and political education," which has emerged prominently in recent years, is fundamentally rooted in the principles of "propagating teachings, imparting professional knowledge, and dispelling doubts," as well as in the essence of "moral education." However, it places increased emphasis on the significant role of the "curriculum" in actualizing educational and nurturing objectives. By seizing upon this critical aspect, ideological and political endeavors find solid ground and practical leverage.

2. Policy Orientation of Ideological and Political Education in College English

"Curriculum-based ideological and political education" refers to an integrated educational philosophy that aims to construct a comprehensive framework of all-encompassing, all-process, and all-course education. This approach aligns various courses with ideological and political theory courses to create a synergistic effect, positioning "moral education" as the fundamental task of education. The Ministry of Education, on April 28, 2020, issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a System for Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education Institutions" alongside the "Guidelines for the Construction of Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions" on June 1, 2020, which clearly stipulate the ideological and political requirements for public foundational courses. These documents emphasize the need to develop a range of courses that enhance students' moral cultivation, humanistic qualities, scientific spirit, constitutional awareness, national security awareness, and cognitive abilities. The goal is to subtly and effectively reinforce students' ideals and beliefs, foster

patriotism, strengthen moral development, expand knowledge and insights, cultivate a spirit of perseverance, and improve students' comprehensive qualities.

Thus, it is evident that all courses offered in higher education institutions must shoulder the significant responsibility and mission of "moral education" and "all-encompassing education." The educational philosophy of "curriculum-based ideological and political education," which regards moral education as its fundamental task, is increasingly attracting attention in the field of foreign language education. Research and practice related to ideological and political education in university foreign language courses are continually emerging. [1-4]

3. Theoretical Foundation of Ideological and Political Education in College English

To better guide the direction of ideological and political education (IPE) in university foreign language courses nationwide and fully leverage their role in moral education, the Ministry of Education's University Foreign Language Teaching Steering Committee began formulating the "Guidelines for Ideological and Political Education in University Foreign Language Courses" in 2021. These guidelines clarify the curriculum, course design, and the essence of IPE, outlining the fundamental principles that should govern IPE teaching design. University English, as a course aimed at enhancing students' English proficiency, should subtly incorporate moral education through material selection, fostering students' social responsibility, academic integrity, and scientific ethics, thereby helping them become individuals of integrity, honesty, dedication, and profound love for humanity.

On March 6, 2021, President Xi Jinping emphasized at the joint meeting of the medical and educational sectors of the Fourth Session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference that "teaching IPE cannot be lifeless and dry, merely reading from documents." He stressed the need to integrate moral education into every aspect of intellectual, cultural, and social practice education, spanning basic, vocational, and higher education.

Wen Qiufang (2021) provided an in-depth interpretation of IPE in foreign language courses: "Led by foreign language teachers, IPE integrates the principles of moral education into every aspect of foreign language classroom teaching through content, classroom management, evaluation systems, and teachers' behavior, playing a positive role in shaping students' worldview, outlook on life, and values." [1] She also constructed an implementation framework and provided practical suggestions for IPE in foreign language courses.

Cai Jigang (2021), using university English courses as an example, explored the essence of classroom IPE and moral education, proposing that the core of IPE is moral education. [3] This involves implicit teaching methods that educate students to strive for a society that is prosperous, democratic, civilized, harmonious, free, equal, just, and governed by law, and to be patriotic, dedicated, honest, and friendly individuals with great love, great virtue, and a great sense of responsibility. While the primary objective of university English courses is to improve students' English language skills, the teaching process can include English and American short stories and essays that promote truth, goodness, and beauty. These materials, combined with students' professional content, can cultivate their social responsibility and scientific ethics within their fields.

Xu Jinfen (2021) further suggested that "the core of IPE in English courses is for teachers to proactively engage, focusing on student development, leveraging the unique features and strengths of English courses to cultivate students' comprehensive language skills, cultural awareness, and thinking character. The construction of teaching materials is crucial in this process." [5]

Practically, Gao Yulei and Zhang Zhiyi (2022) emphasized that teachers play a leading role in classroom teaching, being the primary implementers of the fundamental task of moral education. [6] They summarized four characteristics of university English teachers' IPE teaching abilities: political orientation, generativity, contextuality, and integration. They also constructed a model for these teaching abilities.

Yang Hua (2021) explored practical cases of IPE in foreign language courses in China, such as the "Foreign Language Narration of China" initiative, investigating how IPE elements can be implicitly integrated into course content. [2] Xiang Mingyou (2022) discussed the key issues and directions for IPE teaching design in university English courses from four aspects: teaching objectives, content, methods, and evaluation. [4] He emphasized that the design should follow principles of value guidance, coordination, and systematization. The primary goal is to identify and subtly integrate IPE elements into English teaching practice after establishing the fundamental moral education objectives. The content design should accurately handle the relationship between excavation and integration, avoiding the separation of teaching and IPE. The method design should be student-centered, respecting students' psychological development and utilizing new technologies to innovate continuously. The evaluation design should integrate IPE awareness and abilities defined in the "Guidelines for Ideological and Political Education in University Foreign Language Courses" into the existing evaluation system, emphasizing formative assessment, particularly classroom assessment.

In summary, under the current "big IPE" framework, universities and teachers should continuously and subtly infuse IPE into the teaching of university English courses, thoroughly excavating and refining IPE content within these courses. Ultimately, this will achieve a harmonious blend of knowledge transmission, skill enhancement, and ideological and value guidance.

4. Practical Exploration of Ideological and Political Education in College English

4.1. Cultivating Virtue and Enhancing Teachers' IPE Teaching Abilities

University English education aims to uncover the rich ideological and cultural connotations within the curriculum. It enhances students' understanding and reflection on foreign cultures, comprehension and inheritance of Chinese culture, appreciation of national sentiments, and recognition of socialist core values. This reinforces the fundamental task of moral education in university English teaching, highlighting the course's mission to help students establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. The university English curriculum emphasizes the mission of moral education, focusing on cultivating students' "moral integrity, cultural literacy, scientific spirit, legal awareness, national security awareness, and cognitive abilities". [7] It underscores the dialectical unity of scientific literacy and cultural cultivation, striving to integrate disciplinary knowledge, scientific spirit, and humanistic spirit (Jin Yule, 2014), aligning with the fundamental task of IPE. [8]

Teachers, as the primary force in implementing IPE in classrooms, bear the responsibility of identifying and conveying IPE elements. Their IPE teaching abilities require continuous self-improvement and exemplary conduct, promoting student self-discipline and modeling desired behaviors. Firstly, teachers should possess strong moral character and professional ethics, which, in a narrow sense, includes "moral integrity, professional ethics," and, in a broad sense, encompasses "political stance, ideals, social responsibility, and national sentiments". [9] Teachers should actively serve as role models, guiding students' worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. Secondly, understanding students is crucial. Teachers should respect individual differences, adhere to students' psychological and developmental laws, enhance communication, and treat each student fairly and justly. Thirdly, IPE awareness is essential. Awareness drives action, and university English teachers should recognize the importance of integrating IPE into their teaching as a conscious effort. Lastly, lifelong learning is a fundamental requirement of professional ethics, necessitating that teachers embrace a scientific spirit, pursue continuous learning through various channels, and constantly update their knowledge base.

4.2. Deep Content Exploration and Comprehensive Integration of IPE Elements

The design of IPE in courses needs to be systematic, encompassing all aspects of foreign language teaching—from content to classroom management, evaluation, and teacher behavior. This should be multi-dimensional, covering all levels without gaps or blind spots. [1] In various teaching scenarios, teachers should consciously identify and organically integrate IPE elements into all aspects of university English teaching. General English courses can leverage their humanistic attributes, carefully selecting and embedding elements of world culture, Chinese civilization, socialist core values, and scientific truth to achieve a synergy between excavation and integration. In intercultural communication courses, IPE teaching design should not only select content but also reprocess it during instruction, using comparative and critical analysis methods characteristic of foreign language courses to cultivate students' critical thinking. Specialized English courses can incorporate elements of scientific spirit, professional ethics, and innovation. For phonetics, exposing students to various English dialects can deepen their understanding of multiculturalism and foster an open mindset. In translation, discussions on notable translations and translators can guide students in exploring cultural, ideological, and ethical issues in translation.

Importantly, the integration of IPE elements should be seamless and subtle, ensuring that they do not dilute the disciplinary focus of the course. The content design must avoid confusing IPE with political courses and must strive to prevent the separation of teaching and IPE.

4.3. Organic Integration: IPE Like Salt Dissolved in Water

The methodology for integrating IPE into foreign language courses involves seamlessly embedding moral education within teaching activities, avoiding the perception of IPE as an external addition. IPE should not be viewed as an add-on but as an intrinsic method. Unlike other foundational or specialized courses, university English courses have the advantage of naturally incorporating IPE principles. Both university English and IPE courses are required for all students and involve the integration of Eastern and Western ideologies and cultures. Unlike explicit political courses, university English courses achieve moral education implicitly, like salt dissolved in water—formless and colorless, yet pervasive. This fills the gap in professional courses' moral education, ensuring that comprehensive education permeates every detail.

4.4. Reciprocal Teaching: Building a Teacher-Student IPE Community

The function of IPE in foreign language courses is to collaborate with other courses in helping students establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. Comparing with other cultures, foreign language courses can bolster cultural confidence and respect for other civilizations, providing a vivid understanding of the exchange of civilizations and the construction of a community with a shared future for humanity. Constructing an IPE system from the dual dimensions of teachers and students involves several steps:

During the teaching design phase, teachers need solid disciplinary knowledge and extensive reading backgrounds, enhancing their sensitivity and insight into technological advancements and social changes. Teachers should also guide and engage students, centering on their needs, integrating universal values, Chinese culture, and contemporary scientific development concepts. Utilizing multimodal learning approaches favored by students in the information age, IPE content should be dynamically constructed to meet students' evolving needs. Through deep learning based on problems and scenarios, teachers can lead students beyond superficial knowledge to explore the intrinsic logic and rich values of knowledge. This process, from generating learning desires ("subjectivity") to engaging in dialogues ("why? how? what?") to achieving collaboration ("interaction with teachers and peers to expand and deepen thinking"), optimizes student learning outcomes. Teachers can guide students through emotional and capability transformations via scenario tasks, enhancing their social responsibility, civic literacy, innovation spirit, and entrepreneurial awareness, ultimately achieving mutual growth and IPE goals.

4.5. Blended Teaching: Integrating Modern Information Technology

In the new era of mobility, information, and intelligence, technological advancements significantly impact courses and teaching. They expand curriculum fields, alter teaching activity time and space, and promote the development of digital learning and teaching resources. This fosters new learning modes like online learning, virtual learning, flexible learning, and distance learning. [12] For IPE to be effective, it must adapt to the demands of the times and the trends in educational technology development, advancing the innovative application of IPE teaching methods in university English courses through modern information technology.

Blended teaching, also known as hybrid or mixed-mode teaching, represents a dynamic instructional approach that combines traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning components. This model recognizes the diverse learning needs and preferences of students, offering a flexible and adaptable framework that caters to individual learning styles. By integrating both in-person and online elements, blended teaching creates a comprehensive learning experience that leverages the strengths of both modalities. Students benefit from the flexibility to access course materials and engage in learning activities at their own pace, while educators have the opportunity to employ a variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning outcomes.

The seamless integration of modern information technology is a cornerstone of effective blended teaching practices. With the proliferation of digital tools, platforms, and resources, educators have unprecedented opportunities to enhance the learning experience and optimize teaching effectiveness. Learning Management Systems (LMS), multimedia content, interactive simulations, educational apps, and virtual reality environments are just a few examples of the diverse range of digital resources available to educators. These technological innovations enable educators to deliver engaging and interactive instruction, facilitate collaborative learning environments, and provide students with access to a wealth of learning resources and materials. By leveraging modern information technology, educators can create dynamic and immersive learning experiences that cater to the diverse needs and preferences of students, while simultaneously fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and creativity.

In the context of university English courses, the integration of modern information technology offers unique opportunities for enhancing both language learning outcomes and ideological and political education. Educators can harness digital platforms and resources to deliver engaging language instruction while seamlessly incorporating elements of ideological and political education into the curriculum. For example, multimedia language learning resources can be used to explore topics related to ideology, politics, and culture, providing students with opportunities to develop language proficiency while engaging critically with real-world issues. Online discussion forums can serve as platforms for meaningful discourse on topics related to ideology and politics, encouraging students to analyze and reflect on different perspectives. Virtual reality simulations offer immersive language-learning experiences that allow students to engage with language and culture in a realistic and interactive way. By integrating modern information technology into university English courses, educators can create dynamic and innovative learning environments that foster language proficiency, critical thinking, and civic engagement among students.

5. Conclusion

The integration of ideological and political education (IPE) into university English courses holds significant theoretical and practical implications in the context of the new era. Firstly, comprehensive coverage of IPE within the curriculum allows for a deep fusion of ideological education and English language teaching, promoting the overall enhancement of students' comprehensive qualities. Secondly, the pivotal role of teachers in IPE cannot be overlooked; by enhancing their capacity for ideological teaching, educators can more effectively impart correct values and morals.

The depth of content exploration and organic integration of IPE elements are crucial for ensuring the success of these initiatives. University English courses should leverage their disciplinary strengths to embed rich IPE elements within the teaching process, achieving a harmonious unity between knowledge transmission and value guidance. Additionally, by fostering a community of ideological education between teachers and students, both groups can grow together, creating a positive atmosphere for collaborative education.

The development of information technology presents new opportunities for IPE. Through blended teaching modes, university English courses can better meet the learning needs of students, improve teaching effectiveness, and enhance the appeal and impact of ideological education.

In summary, the implementation of IPE in university English courses represents not only an innovation and development of traditional educational models but also a crucial pathway to fulfilling the fundamental task of cultivating virtue and character. Through continuous theoretical research and practical exploration, university English IPE will contribute significantly to nurturing well-rounded socialist builders and successors with sound moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education. This endeavor not only helps improve the quality of higher education but also provides valuable experience for the development of the educational enterprise in the new era.

Project

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