

Integrating Ideological and Political Education into Curriculum Development in the New Era: Perspectives from English as a Foreign Language Teaching in Universities of China*

Xiaolei Ruan¹, Xueyun Yang²

¹School of Foreign Studies, Anhui University, Hefei, China

²School of Sociology and Political Science, Anhui University, Hefei, China

Email: ruanxiaolei@ahu.edu.cn, xueyunyang@163.com

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Abstract

This paper conducts a comprehensive review of the undergoing ideological and political education integrated into curriculum development in China and discusses the practice of it based on the case of EFL teaching at the tertiary level. It is claimed that a synergistic effect amongst its objectives, content, implementation, and evaluation will facilitate the reform. It is suggested that in order to address the challenges faced by different stakeholders during the course of the curriculum development, factors of EFL teaching force, textbook design, teaching content selection, as well as institutional support should be taken into consideration.

Keywords

Ideological and Political Education, EFL Teaching, Universities, Curriculum

1. Background: A Top-Down Curriculum Reform in China

As China prepares to accomplish major national goals and offer the rest of the world a guiding principle for international cooperation, experts claim that the country is entering a new era like never before in the modern age. China aims to complete its national rejuvenation path over the next few decades. The general secretary of CPC (Communist Party of China) Central Committee, Xi Jinping, laid out this path in his report to the 19th CPC National Congress in October

*This paper explores the significances and practice of integrating ideological and political education into the curriculum development of EFL teaching at the tertiary level.

2017 when he presented his ideas on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era.

The New Era is an important stage in China's development and a crucial period for educational reform. In the New Era, education is no longer just about imparting knowledge, but also about cultivating talents with all-round development of morality, intelligence, physicality, aesthetics and labor. Therefore, as an important content of education reform in the New Era, integrating ideological and political education into curriculum has received wide attention, which refers to the realization of the goal of establishing morality and nurturing people through the cultivation of students' ideological virtues and values in the course of curriculum teaching.

At the national conference on ideological and political work in colleges and universities in December 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping made the following observation: "We should use classroom teaching as the main channel, ideological and political theory classes should be strengthened by insisting on improvement, enhancing the affinity and relevance of ideological and political education, and meeting the needs and expectations of students' growth and development, and all the other classes should guard a section of the ditch and plant a good field of responsibility, so that all kinds of courses with the ideological and political theory courses in the same direction and form a synergistic effect."

China's distinctive educational approach, particularly its emphasis on ideological and political education, has garnered considerable academic attention for its impact on shaping individual values, fostering citizenship, and maintaining social stability (Ouyang et al., 2024). The Guideline for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Courses (henceforth, *The Guideline*) was released by the Ministry of Education on May 28, 2020, in order to fully implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's significant remarks on education and the spirit of the National Education Conference, implement the Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Classes in Schools in the New Era of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council Central Committee, and carry out ideological and political education throughout the talent cultivation system (MOE, 2020b).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is inextricably linked to the process of global integration and is an essential element of quality education for citizens in many countries around the world. As China's "the Belt and Road Initiative" continues to advance, the importance of EFL teaching is self-evident. Focusing on serving the national strategy, EFL teaching will make a great contribution to the integration of China and foreign countries, international communication and the construction of foreign discourse system.

The Outline of the National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) states: "Improving quality is the core task of higher education development". Improving the quality of teaching in higher education requires us to provide college students with quality foreign language

education. College English courses are offered in colleges and universities to meet the strategic needs of the country and to serve the Reform and Opening up of the country and economic and social development on one hand, and on the other hand, to satisfy the needs of students in professional learning, international exchange, further study, work and employment. College English courses have practical significance and long-term influence on the future development of college students. Learning English helps students to establish a global perspective, cultivate international awareness, improve humanistic qualities, and at the same time provides a basic tool for knowledge innovation, potential and overall development, and prepares them to meet the challenges and opportunities of the era of globalization.

2. Significance: “Silent and Soft, It Moistens Everything”

Language is the carrier of culture and thinking, and EFL teaching is an important link in order to put the ideology and politics of the curriculum into practice. Comprehensively promoting the construction of EFL courses' ideology and politics is to put value guidance in the cultivation of the ability to teach language knowledge, and to help students shape a correct worldview, outlook on life and values. This is the proper meaning of talent cultivation, but also the necessary content. In the strategic deployment of foreign language program, students are the “main theme”, foreign language teachers are the “main force”, foreign language curriculum construction is the “main battlefield”, and foreign language classroom teaching is the “main channel”. In the process of building EFL courses, it is necessary to have a “chess” pattern, comprehensively examining various factors such as students, teachers, course design, content, implementation and assessment.

First of all, the integration of ideology and politics into EFL teaching reflects the three-in-one cultivation model of “value shaping”, “knowledge imparting”, and “ability cultivation” (Zhan, 2022). EFL courses and the ideological and political courses go in the same direction, unify explicit and implicit education, form a synergistic effect, and build a big pattern of all-embracing and all-encompassing education.

Secondly, EFL teaching is a platform for the implementation of ideological and political education. EFL teaching runs through all stages of learning, and its impact on students is not only the improvement of language knowledge and skills, but also the understanding of the world's culture and history, the shaping of cross-cultural awareness and thinking, and it is also an important part of establishing correct values, and it is the necessary preparation for “telling China's story” and “making China's voice heard”. It is also an important part of establishing correct values and a necessary preparation for “telling the Chinese story” and “making Chinese voices heard”.

Once again, the reform and practice of the ideology and politics of university EFL courses provide appropriate justifications for solving the current problems of the quality of foreign language education in colleges and universities, meeting

the current needs of national development and students' growth and success, and bringing new opportunities for the organic unity of the instrumental and humanistic aspects of foreign language disciplines, and the reconstruction of the value connotation of foreign language disciplines and national consciousness.

3. Practices: A Curriculum Design Perspective

A comprehensive curriculum design is generally understood to comprise four elements: curriculum objectives, curriculum content, curriculum methodologies, and curriculum evaluation (Tyler, 2013). The curriculum reform for integrating ideological and political education into EFL teaching is greatly influenced by the four factors listed above, therefore, this section sets out to explicate how to implement the curriculum reform from these aspects.

3.1. Determining the Objectives

In the New Era, foreign language education should no longer be merely a tool and medium for understanding the world, but should take on a new mission of "telling China's story". Young people should use foreign languages to disseminate Chinese thought, scholarship and culture (Wang, 2016).

The curriculum objectives can be realized from three aspects: 1) First, developing students' virtues, personalities, and sentiments is integrated with EFL teaching at the tertiary level. Additionally, efforts are made to instill value concepts in language instruction and to integrate the best aspects of traditional Chinese culture with socialist principles. 2) Second, fusing national sentiment with global vision. This is achieved by incorporating Chinese wisdom and concepts into EFL teaching at the tertiary level, integrating Chinese excellent traditional culture elements, emphasizing the development of students' critical and discursive cultural skills, and assisting students in reflecting on and solving global issues. 3) Third, combining language proficiency with innovative thinking by establishing the goals of EFL teaching at the tertiary level in the New Era, cultivating students' intercultural competence, and focusing on the enhancement of students' learning power, thinking power, and action power, to help students become composite talents with a sense of nationalism and international competitiveness.

A systematic effort of integrating ideological and political education into EFL teaching at the tertiary level aims to "genetically" integrate the cultivation and shaping of values into foreign language courses and incorporate "nurturing talents for the country" into the entire process of teaching foreign languages. From the standpoint of supporting the national plan, developing talent, and defining the features of university English courses, it is practically significant to make clear the objectives and values of these courses.

3.2. Identifying the Learning Activities

After setting the ideological and political objectives of the EFL curriculum, the

next focus is to design the teaching content and tasks based on the unit themes and reading materials, and the key is to integrate the ideological and political objectives of the curriculum into the teaching content and students' learning tasks in a subtle way, so as to achieve the effect of moistening.

Teaching content design should consider the coherence and articulation of content, as well as the notion of systematicity. In order to achieve an interlocking and seamless connection, ideological and political education teaching content design for university English courses should be implemented into the university English course system, the overall design of each course and its unit design, permeating all aspects of the teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching methods, education evaluation, organization of the teaching, classroom activities, the second classroom, homework assignments, examination arrangements, etc. The aim is to attain a synergy between the implantation and excavation processes, as well as between the integration and excavation of ideological and political education.

The features of EFL teaching at the tertiary level allow us to concentrate on the unification of values throughout the entire teaching process, including goal-setting, syllabus drafting, content selection, classroom instruction, activity organization, homework assignment and correction, and drawing on the elements of ideological and political education to extract the knowledge's diverse and intrinsic values for students' growth, wisdom enhancement, and emotional enrichment. This way, students will be able to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, and beauty and ugliness as they learn, and they will also learn how to deal with their relationships with nature, society, other people, and themselves, and they will be able to recognize the value of their lives and the significance of their lives.

3.3. Organizing the Experiences

The process of putting the developed curriculum plan into action is known as curriculum implementation, and it serves as a vehicle for achieving the intended educational results, curriculum objectives, and curriculum ideals. It is not just a study of curriculum implementation; it also examines how schools and teachers modify the curriculum during the implementation process and how this affects the degree of curriculum reform.

It is necessary to follow the principles of student-centered, effective use of discussion, questioning, and lecturing while allowing both student- and teacher-led roles to be fully realized (Xiang, 2022). Student initiative is the key to increasing English proficiency. Teachers should use activity scenarios to help students move beyond surface-level symbolic learning of knowledge to go deeper into the inherent logical form of knowledge and the field of meaning, to explore the rich value of the connotation of knowledge, and to realize the developmental value of knowledge teaching to students. This will help students take the initiative on their own and become more self-reliant.

University students are young people, therefore, “education” as well as “teaching” play a role in their values development. The design of EFL teaching at the tertiary level should adhere to the laws of young people’s psychological cognition, civic education, and talent cultivation; it should also foster a positive learning environment, respect students, fully mobilize their autonomy as individuals through academic lectures, thoughtful discussions, and serious exchanges; and lastly, it should cultivate the students’ positive will qualities. In order to accomplish this, instructional strategies must combine explicit and implicit learning, penetration and lecture, history and reality, theory and practice, and other varied pairings.

3.4. Evaluating the Objectives

The Teaching Guidelines for University Foreign Language Courses (henceforth, *The Teaching Guideline*) places a strong emphasis on the necessity of setting up and enhancing a monitoring and inspection mechanism in addition to a multi-faceted assessment and evaluation system for the efficacy of ideological and political education in the curriculum. There is a pressing need for scientific and methodical assessment and evaluation of the politics and ideology used in course development to determine its success. Consequently, one way to encourage the adoption of course ideology and politics is to reinforce the assessment and assurance of university English courses (Zhang & Wu, 2024).

The evaluation of integrating ideological and political education into EFL teaching at the tertiary level should cover all aspects of teaching, including the preparation of teaching materials, teaching design, teaching practice, teaching seminars and so on. The evaluation content mainly includes teachers’ methods and effectiveness in cultivating students’ relevant awareness and ability, students’ recognition of ideological and political education. The evaluation should also incorporate the awareness and competence related to ideological and political education as defined in *The Teaching Guideline* in the existing teaching evaluation system, and emphasize formative evaluation, especially classroom evaluation (MOE, 2020a).

Classroom evaluation can adopt diversified evaluation methods, such as teacher’s evaluation of students, teacher-student cooperative evaluation, students’ self-assessment and mutual evaluation. Evaluation can also take the form of summative evaluation, such as fully integrating elements of ideological and political education into the selection of materials, design of tasks and formulation of evaluation criteria for academic examinations or large-scale foreign language examinations.

4. Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

In this paper, we attempt to revisit the curriculum system in the context of integrating ideological and political education in EFL teaching at the tertiary level. It is claimed that teaching methods should be designed with the needs of the stu-

dents in mind, catering to their internal needs while adhering to the law governing students' psychological development and making full use of new technologies to continuously innovate methods; teaching evaluation design should integrate the knowledge and skills associated with curriculum civics, as outlined in *The Guideline*, into the current evaluation system and give special consideration to formative assessment, particularly classroom evaluation. Evaluation in the classroom in particular needs to be stressed.

The development of ideological and political education in EFL teaching at the tertiary level is currently beset by a number of challenges, including the vague connotations of these concepts, a lack of awareness regarding the politics and ideology of teachers' courses, an unclear path for the practice of these concepts, and a lack of educational mechanisms working together to support the integration of ideological and political education with EFL teaching.

In light of the growing complexity of global affairs and the evolving role of higher education in China, it is imperative that foreign language instructors and academics take an active approach to adapting to and exploring new avenues for the advancement of tertiary EFL education (Figure 1): 1) Teachers have a powerful modeling and leading influence through their words and acts, and developing university English teachers' teaching skills further contributes to the improvement of integrating ideological and political education into EFL teaching. In order to successfully carry out the demands of *The Guideline*, tertiary EFL teachers must possess both strong professional and instructional abilities. 2) Tertiary EFL teaching resources serve as the cornerstone of language learning activities. They convey pedagogical and educational principles and ideologies (Xu, 2021). 3) The selection of content ought to incorporate elements of both Chinese and Western cultures, highlighting regional and global concerns as well as

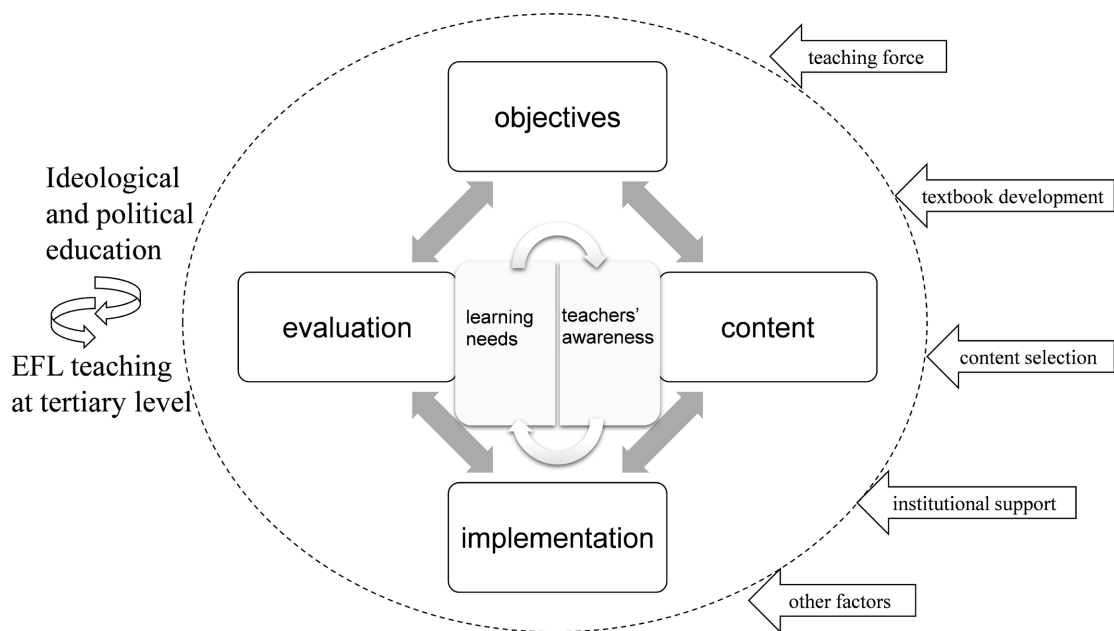


Figure 1. A framework for integrating ideological and political education into EFL teaching at the tertiary level.

the differences between the two. It emphasizes the permeation of culture, values, and ideas while building pupils' basic language proficiency. It also develops their national awareness, cross-cultural communication abilities, and cultural sensitivity. 4) Constructing a synergistic mechanism for the organization of ideological and political education integrated into tertiary EFL teaching is the fundamental guarantee for the course, which can be realized by university synergy, departmental synergy, curricular synergy, and teacher-student synergy (Wen et al., 2020).

In order to fulfill the fundamental task of fostering morality and educating people in an imperceptible way, foreign language disciplines must embrace the New Era and actively serve the needs of national strategic development in strengthening the construction of ideological and political education. EFL teachers must grasp the importance of "what kind of people to train" as the primary educational issue and systematically implement the curriculum. Based on this scenario, we cogently suggest future scholarship could incorporate relevant studies on: 1) EFL teachers' knowledge and qualities to conduct practices to integrate ideological and political education into their teaching, 2) teaching material and resource development for the integration, 3) content design to learn deeply and promote Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era into teaching materials, classrooms and minds, and 4) the structural affordance and institutional support in need for the smooth implementation of the integration. Both quantitative research methods, for instance, large-scale questionnaires and qualitative research methods, for instance, interview and observation could be applied to realize the aforementioned research purposes.

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Author Contributions

XR: conceptualization, methodology, funding acquisition, writing-original draft, review and editing.

XY: funding acquisition and writing-review and editing.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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