

Practical Exploration of Ideological-Political Education for Foreign Language Majors from the Perspective of Educational Ecology

Hu Yu

School of Foreign Studies, Anhui Xinhua University, Hefei, 230088, China

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Abstract: From the perspective of educational ecology, this study systematically explores the challenges facing the ideological-political education in foreign language courses, and taking the course of “Advanced English” as an example, this study attempts to construct a ecological pathway for ideological-political education in foreign language courses featuring holistic harmony and dynamic balance. It is suggested that in the practice of ideological-political education, foreign language teachers are supposed to first raise their ideological-political initiative and competence, excavate ideological-political elements in English texts and design language-skills-supported value objectives and teaching activities. Then making fullest use of AI environment, foreign language teachers are advised to adopt varied teaching methods to integrate ideological-political education into foreign language courses and evaluate the effect of ideological-political education in a scientific and reasonable way. This study is aimed to practically promote the ideological-political reform in foreign language courses.

1. Introduction

In May 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Courses in Institutions of Higher Education^[1] (hereinafter referred to as the Guidelines), requiring the comprehensive promotion of ideological-political education in colleges and clarifying its objectives, requirements and key contents. The Guidelines state that professional courses serve as the basic carrier for ideological-political education in courses. It is necessary to thoroughly sort out the teaching content of professional courses, combine the characteristics, thinking methods and values of different courses, deeply explore ideological and political elements, and integrate them organically into teaching so as to achieve the effect of imperceptible education.

Driven by the Guidelines, a wave of research and construction on course-based ideological education in universities has swept across the country. However, due to the varying educational goals and characteristics among universities, as well as the unique positioning of foreign language majors, the models and paths of ideological-political education in foreign language courses cannot be unified, and scholars have carried out extensive research. Some have explored and analyzed the

construction of ideological-political education in foreign language courses from a theoretical perspective^[2-5], while others examine its implementation from micro perspectives such as teaching materials, teachers and teaching practice^[6-12].

Undoubtedly, although certain achievements have been made in the research on ideological-political education in foreign language courses, there still exist limitations: most micro-level studies focus on only one aspect—teaching materials, teachers or teaching practice—and systematic research combining theory and practice remains insufficient. Therefore, this study, based on the perspective of educational ecology, analyzes the challenges of integrating ideological-political education into foreign language courses. Taking *Advanced English* as an example, it attempts to construct a dynamic, stable, systematic and scientific teaching ecological path to facilitate the reform of ideological-political education in English majors.

2. The Challenges of Integrating Ideological Education into Foreign Language Professional Courses from the Perspective of Educational Ecology

As an interdisciplinary field combining ecology and education, the term “educational ecology” was first proposed by Lawrence Cremin in his book *Public Education* in 1976. It applies the principles and methods of ecology to the field of educational research, emphasizing comprehensive connection, highlighting holistic value, and emphasizing dynamic processes. According to the concept of educational ecology, the foreign language classroom is a constantly evolving ecosystem, in which various ecological factors--- including the teaching subjects, teaching materials, teaching methods, teaching environment and teaching design---are interrelated and coordinated, forming a dynamic balance. However, under the impact of the course-based ideological education, the original ecological factors and structure have changed, and the balance has been disrupted. As a result, the ideological education in foreign language courses is facing significant challenges.

2.1. Foreign Language Teachers Lack Initiative and Literacy in Ideological-Political Education

The success of ideological-political education in foreign language courses largely depends on foreign language teachers^[3]. Based on questionnaire surveys and interviews, Pan Haiying and Yuan Yue^[12] found that foreign language teachers still have many deficiencies in implementing ideological-political education in courses. For instance, teaching objectives focus more on language knowledge and professional competence, with few learning goals in the ideological-political dimension; the design of ideological and political content in teaching is relatively monotonous; and half of the teachers do not include an ideological-political dimension in course assessment.

If instructors lack ideological awareness or ability, only focusing on developing students’ language skills in teaching, such instruction cannot integrate knowledge imparting with value guidance, nor can it achieve the goal of fostering virtue and nurturing talent. Therefore, foreign language teachers need to have ideological and political initiative. In the teaching process, they should guide students to view different cultures objectively, deepen their understanding of the diversity of civilizations, and enhance their critical thinking, cross-cultural comprehension and communication skills^[7].

2.2. Ideological and Political Elements in Textbooks Are Scattered and Hard to Identify

To provide students with authentic contexts for English learning, most textbooks for English majors select works written by authors from English-speaking countries, which reflect various aspects of Western societies. On the one hand, such textbooks contain no obvious ideological and

political elements; on the other hand, they lack systematic cultivation of Chinese culture. This is one of the major differences between foreign language courses and ideological and political courses.

However, Huang Guowen^[8] pointed out that all discourse carries value orientations: some are explicit and prominent, while others are implicit or even obscure. Ideological and political content is embedded between the lines. Therefore, it is necessary to dig out ideological and political elements from seemingly ordinary discourses and integrate ideological-political education into foreign language courses.

Analyzing discourse from an ideological and political perspective does not mean conducting an exhaustive analysis of the whole text. Instead, it focuses on distinctive sentences and phrases with analytical value, interprets them from an ideological and political viewpoint, guides students to think critically in specific contexts, and helps them improve their innovative thinking abilities.

2.3. Teaching Methods Are Disconnected with Ideological and Political Content

For a long time, English-major classrooms have focused on developing students' language skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, resulting in a mismatch between teaching methods and ideological-political content. Most classes take textbook texts as the core, concentrating on vocabulary building, grammatical analysis and translation practice, while ideological-political elements are often marginalized.

For example, in comprehensive English courses, teachers mostly use lecturing and questioning methods to consolidate students' grasp of words, sentences and paragraphs. They rarely encourage students to reflect on the value orientations behind the texts, or guide them to view differences between China and the West dialectically and build cultural confidence in the context of Western culture.

Such a "skill over values" teaching mode leads to the disconnection between ideological-political education and English teaching. It can hardly fulfill the educational function of language courses, nor meet the demand for cultivating interdisciplinary foreign language talents under the goal of "fostering virtue and nurturing talent".

2.4. Smart Teaching Environments Challenge Ideological-Political Education

Against the background of the global AI wave, the concept of empowering ideological-political education in foreign languages with digital intelligence technologies has emerged. On the one hand, by applying digital intelligence technologies, foreign language teachers can build an "intelligence + ideological and political education" teaching platform, organically integrate teaching content with ideological and political resources, and promptly collect and analyze students' learning data, so as to provide a basis for personalized ideological and political education. On the other hand, with the help of intelligent learning platforms, students can engage in effective language communication and ideological and political discussions.

Undoubtedly, while the smart teaching environment brings opportunities for ideological-political education in foreign languages, it also poses challenges. In actual foreign language classrooms, whether AI functions such as knowledge mapping, intelligent grading, and online teaching assistants can effectively assist teachers in practicing ideological and political teaching, whether intelligent learning partners can truly provide students with personalized answers to their questions, and how to use AI to enhance rather than reduce students' critical thinking ability—these are difficult problems that foreign language teachers and students need to solve jointly in the digital age.

2.5. Teaching Design Is Divorced from Ideological-Political Education

The primary task of ideological-political teaching design is to set precise teaching objectives. For foreign language courses, precision means that the ideological-political teaching objectives complement the objectives of linguistic knowledge and skills, and are derived through in-depth exploration of texts^[7]. However, many foreign language teachers fall into the misunderstanding of conducting ideological-political education merely for its own sake. If ideological and political objectives are divorced from texts and implemented aimlessly and mechanically, then ideological-political education in foreign language courses will become a pure political course, failing to coordinate with the cultivation of professional skills and hardly achieving the educational effect of “influencing students silently”.

If teaching objectives provide guidance for teaching activities, scientific evaluation guarantees teaching effectiveness. Although foreign language teachers have mastered diverse evaluation methods, such as the combination of process and terminal evaluation, the combination of teacher evaluation, teacher-student cooperative evaluation, peer assessment and student self-evaluation, as well as the combination of qualitative and quantitative evaluation, their ability to design ideological-political evaluation still needs improvement. Evaluation should not only focus on forms but also correspond to ideological and political content. In other words, the ecological evaluation system should be closely aligned with teaching objectives, integrate the evaluation of ideological-political objectives and language objectives, and give full play to the learning-promoting function of evaluation^[7].

3. Construction of an Ecological Path for Ideological-Political Education in Foreign Language Majors

As mentioned above, from the perspective of educational ecology, the challenges in implementing ideological-political education in foreign language courses arise from the lack of in-depth integration between ideological-political elements and other ecological factors as teaching subjects, textbooks, teaching methods, teaching environment, and teaching design. Therefore, to break through existing difficulties and effectively promote the reform of ideological-political education in foreign language courses, it is essential to construct an ecological path, achieve deep integration of all other ecological factors with ideological-political elements, and establish a new balance in the ideological-political education ecosystem.

Taking the teaching process of Unit 4 “Matriculation Fixation” in the English-major course *Advanced English* with the textbook *Comprehensive Course 6*^[13] published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press as an example, the following part explores how to construct an overall coordinated and dynamically balanced ecological path for ideological-political education.

3.1. Cultivating Teachers’ Initiative and Literacy in Ideological-Political Education

As a key factor in the ideological-political education ecosystem, foreign language teachers’ ideological-political initiative and literacy constitute the foundation for the effectiveness of ideological-political course construction. If teachers are unwilling to systematically explore ideological-political elements in teaching materials, or lack the competence to integrate such elements, they will fail to guide students to establish correct values in actual teaching, and may even lead students astray into blind worship of foreign culture.

Liu Bingdong and Feng Lei^[14] proposed that paths for English-major teachers to improve their ideological-political literacy include, but are not limited to: learning and internalizing relevant theoretical knowledge, participating in seminars on ideological-political teaching, reading related

monographs and academic papers, applying for and conducting research projects on ideological-political courses, and taking part in ideological-political teaching competitions.

Meanwhile, foreign language teachers should also take the initiative to care about students' ideological and psychological conditions, understand their worldviews and values, and implement ideological-political education in ways that match students' interests and cognitive levels. Only by influencing students with their own academic and moral qualities can teachers achieve the educational effect of "improving students gently and imperceptibly".

3.2. Digging Deep into the Ideological-Political Elements in Texts

The essay "Matriculation Fixation" presents the author's views on choosing a university. Although it does not seem to involve explicit ideological-political topics, the text is actually quite suitable for exploring ideological-political elements.

The essay first describes a dilemma faced by a father: whether his daughter should go to a first-tier university that offers no scholarship, or a second-tier university with a free ride. This is a topic that can spark heated discussion among students. Through discussion of this topic, teachers can understand students' attitudes toward elite universities versus non-elite universities.

To persuade the troubled father, the author shares his own memorable experience of studying at a second-tier university: "My college days had been among the happiest of my life, that the sun never set without my thanking God for the illumination and inspiration provided by my talented, dedicated professors." This sentence can encourage students that even in second-rate universities, they can encounter knowledgeable teachers and achieve success, and the key lies in themselves.

The author then elaborates on two common attitudes held by many parents: one is that if their children attend prestigious universities, they believe their children will surely succeed and no longer pay attention to them; the other is that if their children do not attend prestigious universities, they think their children are failures and become shamefaced and miserable from then on. The author refutes these two attitudes, holding that "some children get the finest educations but still become first-class screwups, by contrast, some achieve huge success without a degree from a prestigious university", and finally concludes that the obsession with prestigious universities is unnecessary. For students in ordinary universities, the examples of famous people listed in the article like Warren Buffet, Ronald Reagan and F. Scott Fitzgerald are like lighthouses, inspiring them that not having a degree from a prestigious university does not mean failure, "life doesn't have just one act". For students in prestigious universities, the warning of "going to the right school but ending up in the wrong career" is also indispensable.

Therefore, every discourse carries a value orientation. As long as foreign language teachers carefully identify and explore ideological-political elements, every English text can become a carrier for ideological-political education.

3.3. Integrating Ideological-Political Elements into the Teaching Design

After digging the ideological-political elements in the text, teachers can further design the teaching objectives and activities for this unit. Adhering to the three-dimensional principle of "knowledge + competence + value", the unit is designed with the following objectives:

(1) Knowledge objectives: Students can master the linguistic knowledge in the text, including the understanding and application of theme-related vocabulary and phrases.

(2) Competence objectives: Students are able to analyze the text structure, summarize sub-themes, improve oral communication skills, and develop critical thinking.

(3) Value objectives: Students are supposed to view academic qualifications and university education correctly, never give up in the face of adversity, and remain modest in the face of success.

Although the three dimensions appear independent, they are inherently integrated and logically unified.

To achieve the set teaching objectives, to realize a “genetic integration”^[7] of language teaching and ideological-political education, a series of progressive teaching activities are designed:

(1) Skimming the text to analyze its structure and summarize the main idea of each part; (2) Learning vocabulary and phrases, and paraphrasing key sentences about university selection; (3) Searching for and narrating inspirational stories about celebrities’ success; (4) Conducting role-play to persuade the “father” in the text; (5) Completing a writing task entitled *The Most Important Factor for Success*.

These activities are closely interlinked from input to output, constructing a dynamic scaffold for students to internalize language, apply skills, and achieve value integration.

3.4. Practicing Ideological-Political Education via a Blended “Online + Offline” Approach

In the implementation of teaching activities, teachers can make full use of smart teaching platforms to carry out personalized ideological-political education.

Before class, teachers can post a topic on the platform: “Is a degree from a prestigious university the most important factor on the road to success?” so that students can discuss and air their views on the value of academic qualifications. After the interaction, it is found that more than half of the class believe that a degree from a top university is very important to success, because “students at prestigious universities can enjoy the best learning resources and faculty, build a network beneficial to career development, and more easily gain recognition from well-known companies...” Meanwhile, some students also express anxiety and inferiority about studying at ordinary universities. Teachers can provide positive guidance based on students’ feedback.

During class, following the teaching design, teachers can adopt various methods to implement teaching activities integrated with ideological-political education. For example, organize students to refute some parents’ wrong viewpoints on university selection (discussion-based method); guide students to use AI tools to learn about the success stories of celebrities such as Ronald Reagan, Warren Buffett, and F. Scott Fitzgerald and then share them in class (task-based method); and ask students to conduct role-plays to persuade the “father” facing a dilemma in the text (situational method).

After class, students are required to complete the writing *The Most Important Factor for Success* based on literature review and personal reflection, and upload it onto the teaching platform.

3.5. Evaluating Ideological-Political Effects Scientifically

It is noteworthy that the themed writing *The Most Important Factor for Success* is not only an important activity for practicing ideological-political teaching, but also a key indicator for evaluating ideological-political effects. It can not only assess students’ comprehensive language ability, but also form a critical closed loop for ideological-political education.

Teachers have been astonished to find that in students’ compositions, the most important factor for success is no longer a degree from a prestigious university, but clear goals, persistent efforts, or indomitable courage etc. This stands in sharp contrast to the result of the pre-class discussion.

To verify the authenticity of the writing content, teachers have also invited some students for face-to-face interviews to understand their cognitive changes before and after class. Students stated that this text had indeed given them a chance to reflect, enabling them to “think about the meaning of success”, “face up to their own shortcomings”, and “learn not to blame external factors—graduates from ordinary universities can also stand out in competition”.

Although the evaluation of ideological-political effects is an implicit and long-term process, this

writing task has examined students' language skills, reflected their understanding of the relationship between success and academic qualifications, and corresponded to the teaching objectives. Therefore, it can be used as one of the indicators for teachers to evaluate the achievement of ideological and political objectives and the effectiveness of ideological-political education.

4. Conclusion

Based on the educational ecology, this study discusses the challenges in the ecological reform of ideological-political education in foreign language courses. Taking the unit teaching of *Advanced English* as an example, it attempts to construct an overall coordinated and dynamically balanced ecological path for ideological-political education in foreign language courses.

It has been suggested that in the practice of ideological-political education in foreign language courses, foreign language teachers should first enhance their own initiative and competence of ideological-political education, deeply explore ideological and political elements in textbooks, design value objectives and ideological-political activities based on language skills, and with the help of the intelligent teaching environment, flexibly adopt diverse teaching methods to conduct ideological-political education and value guidance. Finally, teachers should evaluate the effects of ideological-political education scientifically and ecologically, so as to provide a certain backwash effect on teaching.

For foreign language teachers, ideological and political education is not only a mission, a responsibility and a challenge, but also an opportunity, a reform and a breakthrough. Only by continuously improving professional competence and ideological-political literacy, and actively exploring and practicing in teaching can they establish a dynamic balance of the ideological-political education ecosystem for foreign languages and implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education.

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