

A Feasibility Study on Integrating Ideological and Political Education into College English Courses

Fang Yu¹

¹ NingboTech University, Ningbo, Zhejiang, China

¹Corresponding author. Email: fangyu@nit.zju.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of ideological and political education into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses at a Chinese university. It addresses challenges posed by the Western-centric focus of EAP and the issue of “Chinese cultural aphasia”. Using a case study, the research proposes task-driven teaching models, such as Team-Based Learning (TBL), to foster active student engagement and moral cultivation. The study highlights the need for developing resource packages that incorporate Chinese cultural elements, aiming to cultivate globally-minded students with a strong sense of national identity and social responsibility.

Keywords: Higher education in China, English for academic purposes, Morality cultivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ideological and political education is a cornerstone of higher education in China, aimed at fostering the development of students’ worldviews, life perspectives, and values (Cai, 2021) [1]. In recent years, many higher education institutions in China have adopted “curriculum ideology and politics” (课程思政 ke cheng si zheng) as the primary means of implementing ideological education, integrating it into various courses across disciplines. English courses, as compulsory subjects with extensive content and significant social influence, have emerged as a critical platform for the integration of ideological and political education. Consequently, the intersection of ideological education and English instruction has garnered increasing attention among educators, leading to a diverse range of research in this area. These studies have explored various aspects of how ideological and political education can be effectively integrated into English instruction, including the ideological construction of English courses tailored to student needs (Cheng & Li, 2022; Shi, 2024) [2][3], the integration of ideological content into English teaching materials (Dong, 2023; Xu, 2021) [4][5], or the development of blended teaching models that combine online and offline instruction (Li, 2024; Meng, 2020) [6][7].

However, “Academic English” as a distinct course has only recently gained traction in China (Cai, 2012; Wen, 2014) [8][9]. Misconceptions about the course persist within academic circles, such as the belief that academic English can be subsumed under general English teaching or that it is only suitable for advanced students with a solid foundation in English (Cai, 2019) [10]. The misunderstandings have led to inadequate attention to the integration of ideological and political education within Academic English, and a limited understanding of its potential role in this domain. Additionally, the content of English for EAP courses, which typically involves guiding students in reading English literature and producing written academic reports, is heavily influenced by Western linguistic systems and academic conventions (Hang, 2021) [11]. This Western-centric focus poses challenges for integrating Chinese cultural elements into the curriculum, further complicating the integration of ideological and political education.

Despite these challenges, the distinct characteristics of EAP courses — designed to equip students with the skills needed to study and conduct research in English — render them crucial for developing internationally-minded students who are familiar with global norms and capable of engaging in international affairs and competition.

The objective of this study is to explore methods for implicitly incorporating ideological

and political education into the teaching of EAP. Using a Chinese university (referred to as Uni X) as a case study, this study examines practical approaches and teaching models for integrating ideological and political content into the Academic English curriculum, in alignment with the broader ideological education goals in Chinese higher education. This integration aims to address the longstanding dichotomy between ideological education and curriculum teaching in Chinese universities, where knowledge transmission has often been prioritized over moral cultivation (Cui, 2019) [12].

2. THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

Curriculum ideology and politics is not a standalone course, but rather a method or approach employed within Chinese higher education to help students internalize the core values of socialism. Its effectiveness depends on how seamlessly and naturally it is woven into the teaching of various courses. College English courses, which reflect a high degree of integration between Chinese and Western cultures, serve as an important medium for humanistic education, and are thus vital to fulfilling the fundamental educational mission of moral cultivation. The “Implementation Outline of the Quality Improvement Project of Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities(《高校思想政治工作质量提升工程实施纲要》)”, issued by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in December 2017 (MoE, 2017) [13], underscored the importance of embedding ideological and political education into university classroom environments. The 2020 edition of the “College English Teaching Guide (《大学英语教学指南》)” (MoE, 2020) [14] further reinforced this mandate by calling for the ideological and political construction of college English courses.

However, a lack of proper understanding and positioning of ideological and political education has led to its mechanical incorporation into some English courses, resulting in suboptimal outcomes. Such an approach can render students passive in their learning, diminishing their interest in both ideological education and the English course itself. English instructors must thoughtfully consider how to effectively and subtly integrate moral education into their teaching, guiding and encouraging

students to engage in ideological learning proactively.

For EAP instructors, it is particularly important to utilize teaching opportunities to help students appreciate China’s own research stories and the contributions of Chinese scientists. Educators should guide students to critically engage with Western academic literature and inspire them to explore themes such as social responsibility, academic integrity, scientific ethics, and dedication within the context of academia and research.

3. THE ISSUE OF CHINESE CULTURAL APHASIA IN EAP TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA

Chinese cultural aphasia, characterized by the inability to express Chinese cultural concepts in English, is a prevalent issue in college English courses, attracting significant scholarly attention. Hu (2022) [15] conducted a study involving 408 students from a Chinese university, including both English majors and students from other disciplines, and found that many participants struggled to articulate Chinese cultural concepts in English. This difficulty often stems from an overemphasis on the negative transfer effects of the mother tongue in English learning, which can lead to unidirectional cross-cultural communication. Additionally, Xiao et al. (2009) [16] highlighted that some college English instructors also exhibit deficiencies in translating Chinese cultural knowledge into English, attributing this phenomenon to a lack of focus on Chinese cultural content within college English curricula.

The issue of Chinese cultural aphasia is particularly pronounced in Academic English courses due to the nature of the course content. While these courses often emphasize learning advanced foreign technologies and achievements, there is a risk of fostering an uncritical admiration of Western developed countries, potentially undermining national self-confidence. Therefore, integrating ideological and political education into EAP courses, with a focus on incorporating Chinese cultural elements, is crucial for guiding students to understand China’s academic contributions and fostering a sense of national pride and confidence.

4. PATHWAYS FOR INTEGRATING IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION INTO EAP TEACHING

4.1 TBL Model + Humanistic Learning Theory: Transforming Passive Learning into Active Engagement

Team-Based Learning (TBL), developed by Larry K. Michaelsen, is a pedagogical approach designed to enhance student engagement and learning through structured teamwork, particularly in large classes. The five stages of TBL — forming teams, identifying key teaching points, individual and group assessments, and applied exercises — emphasize the importance of forming cohesive student teams that facilitate mutual supervision, resource sharing, and the development of lifelong learning habits (Michaelsen, 2002) [17].

At Uni X, the EAP course, offered to second-year non-English majors from a variety of disciplines, provides an ideal environment for forming multidisciplinary academic teams. These teams enable students to share learning resources, leverage each other's strengths, and extend teamwork beyond the classroom, thereby laying the foundation for future research collaboration. Dividing large classes into smaller teams fosters a more harmonious classroom dynamic, stimulates students' intrinsic motivation, and encourages collaborative task completion, thus shifting the focus from rote learning to independent inquiry.

Incorporating humanistic learning theory, as advocated by Carl Rogers, into this inquiry-based model further enhances the effectiveness of this approach. Rogers emphasized the importance of student-centered teaching, where the learning process is meaningful, and students experience self-actualization and growth (Rogers, 1984) [18]. This model helps to bridge the gap between ideological education and course content, transforming students' passive acceptance of ideological messages into active exploration, thereby achieving the educational goal of moral cultivation. Accordingly, the teaching approach is structured as follows, primarily utilizing the TBL model in conjunction with the principles of "humanistic learning theory":

- Theme introduction and goal clarification: It is to create an academic research scenario where students explore academic

ethics, thereby clarifying the ideological and political education goals of the course.

- Task-driven knowledge exploration: Students independently search for solutions to potential academic ethics issues, utilizing resources such as textbooks and supplementary materials.
- Collaborative discussion and deep thinking: Group discussions deepen students' understanding of academic ethics, reinforcing the necessity of integrating ideological education into the EAP course.
- Showcase and collective communication: Students present their findings, highlighting the value-oriented role of socialist core values in academic research.
- Practice, reflection, and internalization: Students apply the learned academic ethics in new scenarios, reflecting on their experiences to consolidate the core ideas of ideological education.

4.2 Analysis-Screening-Supplementation: Developing an Ideological and Political Resource Package for "Academic English"

This study aims to construct a resource package tailored to the ideological and political education needs of the EAP course. Current college English textbooks often fall short in cultivating students' humanistic, cultural, and moral literacy, leading to insufficient depth of knowledge and critical thinking development (Liu & Yue, 2020; Zhuang, 2005) [19][20]. This necessitates the independent construction of teaching materials by instructors, which demands both creativity and initiative (Xu, 2021) [16].

Leveraging "telling Chinese stories" as a strategic entry point, this study enhances the ideological content of existing materials through a three-step process of "analysis, screening, and supplementation" (ibid: 22) [16]. This approach ensures that the teaching resources not only possess theoretical depth and contemporary relevance but also meet the diverse academic English needs of students from different majors.

4.2.1 Analysis

The first step involves analyzing the thematic focus, target audience, and objectives of the course materials. The EAP course primarily teaches university students how to engage in academic

study and research in English, while also fostering a sense of social responsibility. Given the globalized context in which cultures and ideologies frequently interact, English serves as a crucial medium for students to understand the world. Therefore, integrating ideological education into the EAP curriculum is essential for establishing correct values among students, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the course.

EAP course, an extension course for second-year non-English majors in Uni X, targets students at intermediate levels of English proficiency. The course uses the first volumes of the textbooks “Academic Encounters: Life in Society” to train in the four skills – listening and speaking, reading and writing-, both from Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. The thematic content covers aspects of social life, including marriage culture, gender roles, media influence, and legal issues. However, the material’s Western-centric examples and outdated content fail to resonate with Chinese students, who belong to the digital generation and increasingly engage with the challenges and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence.

Moreover, the design of after-class exercises primarily tests comprehension rather than fostering critical thinking, which should be a central goal of

an EAP course. Therefore, instructors must take the initiative to select and supplement course materials to meet the curriculum’s ideological and political objectives.

4.2.2 Screening and Supplementation

Given the gaps in current textbooks, instructors must rigorously screen and supplement the teaching materials to align with the ideological and political goals of the curriculum. This process is iterative and requires continuous adjustment based on student feedback and classroom effectiveness. Materials such as articles from China Daily on current affairs, national policy developments, and China’s latest technological achievements, as well as literary works and films that promote positive values, are incorporated to enrich the ideological content of the course. Additionally, including examples of Chinese scholars’ unique learning methods and academic spirit in academic English contexts can strengthen students’ commitment to conducting research in China.

For instance, the course design for integrating ideological and political education into the unit “The Role of Mass Media” from the chapter on “Mass Media and Society” in EAP course is presented in “Figure 1”.

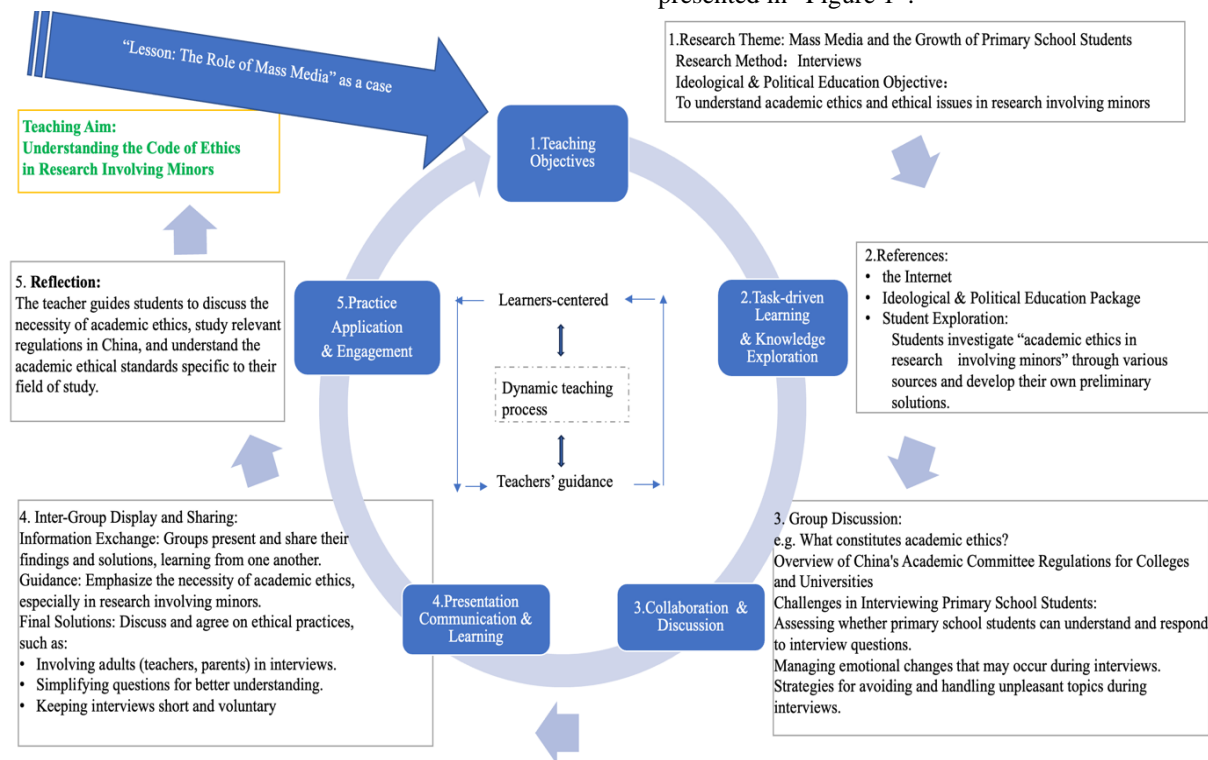


Figure 1 Sample teaching process: Using “The Role of Mass Media” as a case.

5. CONCLUSION

In the context of the “Great Ideological and Political” education initiative in Chinese universities, this study uses the “Academic English” classroom at a Chinese university as a case study to explore how to implicitly integrate ideological and political education within an “independent inquiry” model. This approach aims to shift students' ideological learning from passive acceptance to active engagement. The findings offer valuable insights for constructing and improving the practice of integrating Chinese cultural discourse within academic English teaching and provide a reference for similar explorations in other foreign language courses in Chinese higher education.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The sole author was responsible for all aspects of writing the paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Project: NingboTech University 2022 Annual Teaching Reform Research Project, General Project: “How to Integrate Ideological and Political Education into ‘Academic English’ Courses — A Feasibility Study of the ‘Self-Inquiry’ Teaching Model”.

REFERENCES

- [1] J.G. Cai, Exploring the Connotations of Course Ideology and Moral Education: A Case Study of College English Courses (translated), *Foreign Languages Research* 3(181) (2021) 52-57. DOI: 10.13978/j.cnki.wyj.2021.03.009
- [2] J. Cheng, J.M. Li, Constructing Ideological and Political Education in College English Courses: A Case Study Based on Student Needs (translated), *Overseas English* 6 (2022) 21-123.
- [3] W. Shi, Practical Pathways and Reflections on Ideological and Political Education in College English Courses at Art Schools (translated), *Gleanings from a Hundred Schools* 2 (2023) 166-167.
- [4] G.J. Dong, Exploring the Construction of College English Textbooks under the Background of Ideological and Political Education: A Case Study of “New Era Mingde College English Comprehensive Course” (translated), *Journal of Ningxia Normal University* 44(12) (2023) 31-34.
- [5] J. F. Xu, Building Ideological and Political Content in College English Teaching Materials (translated), *Foreign Language World* 2 (2021) 18-23.
- [6] W. Li, Exploration of Online and Offline Integration Teaching Based on Curriculum Ideological and Political Education—Taking the “Java SSM Framework Technology” Course as an Example, *Modern Information Technology* 8(9) (2024) 190-198.
- [7] L. Meng, Pathways for Integrating Ideological and Political Education in College English through Blended Teaching (translated), *SOCIAL SCIENTIST* 12 (2020) 136-141.
- [8] J. G. Cai, English for Academic Purposes curriculum needs analysis and pedagogical research (translated), *Foreign Language Learning Theories and Practice (FLLTP)*, 2 (2012) 20-35.
- [9] Q. F. Wen, General vs. Specific English in College Teaching: Issues and Solution (translated), *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, 1 (2014) 1-8. DOI: 10.13458/j.cnki.flatt.004408
- [10] J. G. Cai, Academic English Revisited: Academic English or General English (translated)? *Journal of Xi'an International Studies University* 27(1) (2019) 7-11. DOI: 10.16362/j.cnki.cn61-1457/h.2019.01.002
- [11] S. Hang, Y. F. Hu, H. B. Chen, Y. M. Tian, Exploring Ideological and Political Education in Academic English Courses for Materials Science (translated), *RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION OF ENGINEERING I* (2021) 154-157.
- [12] G. Cui, Building Course Ideology in Foreign Language Education within the Comprehensive Ideological and Political Education’ Framework (translated), *Ideological and Theoretical Education*, 7 (2019) 138-140.
- [13] MoE, Notice from the Party Leadership Group of the Ministry of Education of the Communist Party of China on Issuing the “Implementation Outline for the Quality

- Improvement Project of Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities” (translated), 2017, http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A12/s7060/201712/t20171206_320698.html
- [14] MoE, Notice on Issuing the “Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Courses” (translated), 2020, http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A08/s7056/202006/t20200603_462437.html
- [15] L. Y. Hu, On the Status of Chinese Cultural Aphasia and its Countermeasures in College English Learning, *Journal of Shanxi Datong University (Social Science Edition)*, 36(3) (2022) 123-125.
- [16] L. F. Xiao, D. Xiao, L. Li, Y. W. Song, A Study of the “Chinese Culture Aphasia” in Present English Education in Chinese Higher Education, *FLLTP*, 1 (2010) 39-46.
- [17] L. K. Michaelsen, K.A. Bauman, L. D. Fink, *Team-based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching*, Sterling: Stylus Publishing, 2002.
- [18] C. Rogers, *Some Personal Thoughts on Teaching and Learning*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Teaching Materials (translated), 1984.
- [19] Z. G. Liu, M.M. Yue, Resetting the Educational Philosophy and Restructuring Learning Content to Implement Morality Cultivation in Foreign Language Course Instruction, *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 43(5) (2020) 21-29.
- [20] Z. X. Zhuang, Some thoughts on the construction of textbooks for undergraduate students majoring in English (translated), *Foreign Languages World*, 3 (2005) 2-6, 18.
- [21] J. F. Xu, Q. Zhu, M. Yang, The embodiment of the critical thinking ability of English textbooks in Germany and the enlightenment for the compilation of English professional textbooks in China (translated), *Foreign Language Teaching*, 6 (2015) 44-48.
- [22] Y. G. Shi, To be an honest scholar and an upright person - to speak at the 2018 National Report on the Propaganda and Education of Scientific Ethics and the Construction of Study Style (translated) (2018.10.15).
- https://www.sohu.com/a/273920987_9993865
5. [2022.10.05]