

Research on Ideological and Political Education in College English Curriculum Under the Reading Circle Teaching Model in Application-Oriented Universities

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Abstract

This study explores the practical pathways for integrating ideological and political education into college English courses through the Reading Circle teaching model. The current status of ideological and political education practices in college English course is analyzed through empirical data, and the existing challenges in their integration are also identified. Based on students' feedback and classroom observation, the reform of ideological and political education in college English courses has been implemented. Specifically, under the Reading Circle Model, student-centered group learning is adopted to subtly integrate ideological and political elements into college English reading courses, thereby fully leveraging the educational role of college English courses.

Keywords: curriculum ideological and political education, Reading Circle Model, college English teaching

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In May 2020, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the *Guidelines for Ideological and Political Construction in Higher Education Courses*, emphasizing the imperative to “implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education by integrating value orientation, knowledge acquisition, and skill development into an indivisible whole (MOE, 2020)”. The document further highlights that public foundational courses should “subtly yet effectively strengthen students' ideals and convictions, cultivate patriotism, enhance moral integrity, expand intellectual horizons, foster a spirit of perseverance, and improve overall competence.”

As a compulsory public foundational course for most non-English-major undergraduates, College English plays a crucial role in advancing the mission of moral education. Its integration of ideological and political education transcends the mere impartation of linguistic knowledge and skills; rather, it aims to elevate students' ethical awareness and nurture individuals with profound compassion, integrity, and social responsibility (Long, 2022). In this context, the Reading Circle Model offers a viable pathway for integrating ideological and political education with college English instruction.

1.2 The Importance of the Research

University foreign language courses inherently embody both instrumental and humanistic attributes. While they impart linguistic knowledge and skills, they also subtly convey the ideological underpinnings, cultural ethos, and value systems embedded within language itself. These courses are rich in ideological-political education (IPE) elements and bear the critical responsibility of fostering students' ideological and moral development, positioning them as a strategic breakthrough and innovative vehicle for advancing curriculum-based ideological-political education.

Rooted in cooperative learning theory, which emphasizes interpersonal collaboration and interaction among participants to optimize group learning efficiency, the Reading Circle pedagogical model fosters cognitive reciprocity and continuous knowledge construction (Furr, 2004). By engaging students in collaborative text analysis and problem-solving, this model systematically elevates their cognitive abilities and English proficiency. Empirical studies have substantiated its efficacy in integrating IPE elements into College English curricula, demonstrating its scientific validity for embedding value-driven education within language instruction.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Reading Circle Model

The “Reading Circle” is a student-led, peer-collaborative pedagogical model designed to address the limitations of traditional teacher-centered reading instruction (Daniels, 2002). In this model, students form temporary reading groups under instructor guidance, aiming to integrate autonomous and cooperative learning. The key features are including: student-selected reading materials, 6–7 members as a group, role-based task assignments (e.g., discussion leader, cultural analyst), completion of role-specific worksheets, group discussions, peer evaluations, and instructor-led summarized feedback. Collaboration is manifested through collective inquiry, mutual assistance, and the joint completion of reading tasks.

In college English teaching, Reading Circle activities adhere to cooperative principles, fostering critical inquiry and the continuous development of cognitive abilities and language proficiency. This approach motivates students to engage purposefully in learning activities, enhancing key foreign language competencies—such as critical thinking, cross-cultural communication, and ethical reasoning—that inherently carry ideological and educational value (Bernadowski, 2013).

1.3.2 Curriculum ideological and political education

In December 2016, at the national conference on ideological and political work in colleges and universities, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, “We must insist on making the establishment of morality and nurturing people as the central link, and run ideological and political work through the entire process of education and teaching, so as to realize the whole process of nurturing people, all-around nurturing, and strive to create a new situation for the development of the cause of China’s higher education.”

“Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education” does not refer to the direct extraction of ideological and political education elements from classroom instruction. Rather, it requires innovative instructional design that aligns with disciplinary characteristics and specialized course content, organically integrating value-laden theories embedded in professional knowledge with ideological and political education theories (Fu, Yu, & Zhou, 2023). This approach aims to enhance the tangible effectiveness of educational concepts and contribute to the construction of a comprehensive educational framework.

In this context, scholars have defined ideological and political education in college English course. Professor Wen emphasizes that college English curriculum-based ideological and political education refers to a pedagogical paradigm where foreign language teachers, through instructional content, classroom management, evaluation systems, and professional conduct, systematically incorporate moral education principles into all aspects of foreign language teaching (Wen, 2021). This methodology is designed to actively cultivate students’ correct worldview, philosophy of life, and value system in alignment with socialist core values.

2. Method

This study adapts convenience sampling to collect data based on the demographic variables regarding, gender, major, and the latest CET4 score.

2.1 Sampling and Samples

A convenience sampling was used in sophomore of an applied-oriented college in Yunnan Province to select 136 students from 5 classes, including 65 boys, 71 girls. Among these students, 36 students are studying liberal art, 100 students studying science.

Before the students responded to the questionnaires, they had been told the importance of this study and were required to carefully finish the questionnaire in a limited time. Among all the returned questionnaires 136 students’ responses were valid, so they were adapted to process and analysis.

2.2 Instruments

This study primarily employed a questionnaire survey method to investigate and analyze the current status of ideological and political education in college English courses from students’ perspectives, aiming to identify existing issues in the curriculum’s ideological and political practices in college.

The questionnaire was adapted from Wenjing Yu’s (Yu, 2023) survey instrument on ideological and political implementation in college English courses. The questionnaire consists of four sections. The first section is about subjects’ personal information. The rest sections mainly focus on three key dimensions: students’ cognitive understanding of ideological-political elements in college English courses, the implementation status of these elements, and students’ attitudes along with effectiveness analysis regarding current practices.

The survey targeted sophomore in college, all using the New Horizon College English textbook series, with academic concentrations primarily in humanities and STEM fields. A total of 136 valid questionnaires were collected. The reliability of the questionnaires is above 0.5. The Cronbach's alpha index of the whole scale is 0.821 (n=25), which means that the reliability of this questionnaire is acceptable.

2.3 Data Analysis

The SPSS 23.0 was applied to analyze the quantitative data withdrew. To answer the questions proposed in this paper, descriptive was used to reveal students' current situation of students' cognitive understanding of ideological-political elements in college English courses, the implementation status of these elements, and students' attitudes along with effectiveness analysis regarding current practices.

3. Results

3.1 Analysis of Cognitive Awareness of Ideological and Political Education in College English Curriculum

The survey reveals generally positive attitudes among university students toward the integration of ideological and political education in college English courses. As detailed in Table 1, when asked, "Do you approve of English teachers incorporating ideological and political education content into college English classes? How necessary do you consider this practice?", an overwhelming majority (90.45%) expressed approval and acknowledged its necessity, while 7.35% remained neutral, and only 2.21% disapproved.

These findings indicate strong student endorsement of ideological and political education integration in college English instruction, reflecting broad support for curriculum reform in this domain. However, the persistence of negative attitudes among a small minority highlights the need for targeted pedagogical guidance and continuous refinement of educational content. Such efforts are critical to ensuring the sustained effectiveness and successful implementation of ideological and political education within the curriculum.

Table 1. Analysis of University Students' Attitudes Toward the Integration of IPE in College English Courses

Item	Options	Frequency	Percent
<i>Approval of English teachers' integration of IPE in college English courses; necessary or not?</i>	A. Strongly agree, highly necessary	52	38.24%
	B. Agree, necessary	71	52.21%
	C. Neutral, indifferent	10	7.35%
	D. Disagree, unnecessary	3	2.21%
	E. Strongly disagree, completely unnecessary	0	0%

3.2 Analysis of the Implementation of IPE in College English Courses

As shown in Table 2, from the student perspective, instructors actively integrate ideological and political education into college English instruction, demonstrating active engagement in curriculum reform. A significant majority of students (91.91%) reported that teachers analyze and declare the profound philosophical principles included in textbook passages during lessons. Additionally, 86.76% noted that instructors incorporate content related to Chinese culture, geography, history, and political thought into their teaching. Meanwhile, 86.77% of respondents indicated that teachers extend classroom discussions to current social affairs and trending topics.

The findings suggest that most students recognize the integration of ideological and political elements in English instruction. However, a small minority (less than 8%) perceived such integration as occurring only "occasionally" or "sporadically". To address this disparity, teachers should prioritize identifying student-centered content and diversifying pedagogical approaches to seamlessly embed ideological and political education into college English courses, thereby meeting the needs of all learners.

Additionally, teachers should adopt various teaching methods to arouse students' learning interests in Chinese culture, history, geography and policy. During English teaching, instructors should conduct dual cultural education. The strong identity of Chinese culture and Western culture was important to enhance students' English learning motivation, and the dual cultural education was significant and necessary for achieving the balance between mother language culture and target language culture. Cultural identity not only facilitates the heritage learning of a

language but also plays an accelerating role in second language learning. “Belonging to a cultural group” helps language learners improve their language proficiency and lessen the frequency of accents and language use. When they acquired productive bilingualism in the Chinese context, they would make a balance between the two cultures and got better achievement in English learning.

Table 2. Faculty Practices in Embedding Ideological-Political Elements into College English Teaching

Items	Options	Frequency	Percent
Does your instructor, while teaching texts from the college English textbook, assist students in analyzing and comprehending the profound philosophical principles underlying the passages?	A. Always	58	42.65%
	B. Frequently	67	49.26%
	C. Occasionally	6	4.41%
	D. Rarely	5	3.68%
	E. Never	0	0%
In college English instruction, does your instructor incorporate content related to Chinese culture, geography, history, or political ideology?	A. Always incorporate	36	26.47%
	B. Frequently incorporate	82	60.29%
	C. Occasionally incorporate	10	7.35%
	D. Rarely incorporate	8	5.88%
	E. Do not incorporate at all	0	0%
Does your instructor extend classroom discussions to include current social affairs and trending topics during college English lessons?	A. Always extend	43	31.62%
	B. Frequently extend	75	55.15%
	C. Occasionally extend	8	5.88%
	D. Rarely extend	10	7.35%
	E. Do not extend at all	0	0%

3.3 Analysis of the Current Status of Ideological-Political Education in College English Curriculum

As presented in Table 3, over 98% of students reported that the ideological-political content integrated into their college English classes captured their interest. Specifically, 38.24% expressed strong interest, while 44.12% indicated moderate engagement. Furthermore, more than 93% of respondents acknowledged the positive impact of ideological-political education on their development. Among these, 47.06% noted “exceptionally significant positive effects, with clear advancements in ideological awareness and value systems,” and 46.32% observed “some positive influences, including progressive ideological growth and enhanced critical perspectives on global issues.”

Overall, the findings demonstrate broad student interest in ideological-political education within college English courses, with substantial evidence of its beneficial effects on students’ ideological consciousness and value systems. However, the persistence of disengagement among a small minority (less than 2%) warrants targeted attention to ensure inclusive pedagogical efficacy.

Table 3. Analysis of Students’ Attitudes and Perceived Effectiveness of IPE in College English Curriculum

Items	Options	Frequency	Percent
Has the ideological-political content integrated into your college English classes engaged your interest?	A. Sparked strong interest	52	38.24%
	B. Moderately interested	60	44.12%
	C. Neutral	22	16.18%
	D. Minimal interest	0	0%
	E. No interest at all	2	1.47%
Has the ideological-political content in college English instruction positively influenced your ideological awareness, perspectives, or worldviews?	A. Exceptionally significant impact	64	47.06%
	B. Moderate impact	63	46.32%
	C. No focused attention	6	4.41%
	D. Negligible impact	2	1.47%
	E. No discernible impact	1	0.74%

4. Discussion

Based on Reading Circle Model, the practical path of ideological and political teaching of college English courses should have the following points. That is, the integration of the Reading Circle model with flipped classroom pedagogy fosters personalized learning and independent thinking among students, thereby elevating the quality and efficacy of Reading Circle activities. Within the context of College English teaching reform, this combined approach prioritizes student agency in the assessment process while leveraging instructor-led classroom observations, reflective journals, and interviews to establish a robust formative assessment mechanism for English courses. Empirical evidence underscores the model's capacity to synergize language acquisition with ideological-political educational objectives (IPE), positioning it as a transformative tool for holistic student development in higher education.

4.1 Teaching Design

This study conducts an in-depth exploration of the ideological-political education elements embedded in textbook reading materials. Taking Unit 3 of *New Horizon College English: Reading and Writing Course 1* as an illustrative case, the unit's thematic focus on "Higher Education and Youth Development" incorporates ideological-political education elements centered on "Perspectives on Youth", including responsibility, commitment, and perseverance.

Through textual analysis and pedagogical design, these values are systematically integrated into language learning activities to foster students' ethical awareness and civic identity while advancing curriculum ideological-political objectives.

Thus, three tasks are designed to integrate ideological-political education elements:

- (1) Clarify educational objectives – defining the unit's pedagogical goals aligned with ideological-political values.
- (2) Analyze instructional content – identifying value-laden themes and language components in the text.
- (3) Design classroom teaching strategies – structuring activities to integrate language learning and value cultivation.

After finishing the three tasks above, the educational objectives of this unit are designed as followings:

- (1) Linguistic Competence: Mastery of key vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures.
- (2) Skill Development: Proficiency in reading strategies (e.g., comparative analysis) and comparative essay writing techniques.
- (3) Critical Application: Discuss how young adults can navigate challenges during their "Odyssey years" (a metaphor for post-graduation struggles), drawing connections to real-life scenarios; Guide students to articulate evidence-based, objective perspectives on the difficulties frequently faced by contemporary youth after graduation; Foster resilience by encouraging proactive attitudes, sustained focus, and self-discipline to overcome transitional hardships.

4.2 Implementation of Teaching Practices

4.2.1 Pre-class Preparation

Reading Circle Formation: Students autonomously form learning groups of 4–6 members, selecting roles and tasks (e.g., Discussion Leader, Critical Connector) based on the Reading Circle framework.

Pre-reading Engagement: Scaffolding Content Knowledge: A video lecture excerpt on President Xi's Perspectives on Youth is introduced to contextualize the unit's theme. And then ask students to complete fill-in-the-blank exercises using sentences extracted from the text, such as: "A nation will prosper only when its young people thrive".

4.2.2 In-class Activities

Instructors guide groups to connect textual content with ideological-political themes (e.g., resilience, social accountability) through scaffolded questioning and reflective prompts. Classroom activities emphasize responsibility, perseverance, and rational problem-solving as core youth values. Different roles need to read the text by themselves firstly, and then finish their own duties. Every task brings both challenges and rewards to them. When finishing detailed tasks, their reading ability, critical thinking ability, cooperative ability, and other abilities are promoted together. The details in role allocation and design intent are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Role Allocation in Reading Circles

Role	Task	Design Intent
Highlighter	Find out and appreciate key words in text (phase, agenda, reinforce, etc.)	Guide students to pay attention to government reports in their daily learning
Researcher	Research background information of the text(the meaning of "Odyssey Years")	Help team members better understand the text
Questioner	Ask meaningful questions and let team members join in the discussion. (e.g., How does the author think that young people should spend the Odyssey years?)	Promote students' critical thinking ability
Connector	Connect the key points in the text with their own life.(e.g. According to the four stages of life mentioned in Paragraph 1, please analyze which stage you are now in?)	Improve students' ability to solve practical problems in life
Summarizer	Summarize the main points of the text.(e.g. According to the text, what kind of attitude should college students take to spend the Odyssey years, give up or struggle?)	Enhance students' concluding and cooperative ability
Illustrator	Complete the vacancy part of the mind map, making it easier for team members to learn the writing structure	Cultivate students with all-round development

4.2.3 Post-class Activities

Students are tasked with self-studying SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and referencing exemplar templates. Using SWOT principles, students conduct an objective and actionable self-analysis and create a mind map.

The scenario is framed as: "Assume you are facing graduation and job-seeking. Conduct a pragmatic self-assessment by integrating personal capabilities with external environmental factors." The writing tasks prompt students to internalize these values while honing academic and ethical competencies.

4.2.4 Teaching Evaluation

The evaluation framework combines peer assessment and instructor feedback. This design ensures a cohesive blend of language acquisition and ideological-political education, aligning with international standards for critical pedagogy and holistic student development.

(1) Peer Assessment:

After completing thematic mind maps, each Reading Circle group selects a representative to deliver an in-class presentation. Remaining groups evaluate presentations using a standardized rubric that assesses: English language proficiency (e.g., clarity, grammatical accuracy); collaborative skills (e.g., role contribution, team coordination); critical thinking (e.g., argument depth, analytical rigor); integration of ideological-political elements (e.g., alignment with youth responsibility, ethical reasoning).

(2) Instructor Feedback:

Instructors provide supplementary comments, correct inaccuracies in mind maps or presentations, and offer guided reflections. Final scores are determined by synthesizing peer evaluations with instructor assessments based on the same rubric.

In conclusion, this study explores the practical pathways of integrating ideological and political education into College English courses at applied universities through the Reading Circle Model. It aims to clarify the current status, existing challenges, and feasibility of implementing ideological-political education reform in College English teaching under the Reading Circle Model. The findings reveal that the Reading Circle approach effectively enhances students' autonomous learning capabilities, collaborative competencies, and critical thinking skills. By bridging language acquisition with value internalization, the Reading Circle model exemplifies a pedagogically robust framework for achieving the dual objectives of academic excellence and ideological-political literacy in higher education. This research provides valuable insights for achieving synergistic integration between English language instruction and ideological-political education, offering referential significance for curriculum reform in higher education.

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