



Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education in Comprehensive English Courses Under the Background of New Liberal Arts

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the “New Liberal Arts” initiative, which emphasizes interdisciplinary integration, value orientation, and social responsiveness, higher foreign language education is required to transcend the traditional focus on linguistic skills and integrate ideological and political guidance into teaching practice. This study explores the implementation path and effectiveness of Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education (CIPE) in Comprehensive English courses, a core course for non-English majors in Chinese universities. Adopting an action research approach, the study was conducted with 86 first-year non-English major students (divided into an experimental group and a control group) from a university in eastern China over a 16-week semester. Research tools included teaching design schemes (with CIPE elements integrated for the experimental group), pre/post-language proficiency tests, pre/post-ideological cognition questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0, while qualitative data were coded via Nvivo 12.0. Results showed that: 1) The experimental group outperformed the control group in both language proficiency (e.g., reading comprehension, writing coherence) and ideological literacy (e.g., cultural confidence, social responsibility); 2) Students in the experimental group demonstrated higher recognition of the integration of CIPE into English teaching, reporting enhanced interest in cross-cultural communication and a deeper understanding of Chinese values; 3) Teachers involved in the study reported improved ability to identify and integrate ideological elements into textbook content. The findings confirm that integrating CIPE into Comprehensive English courses under the New Liberal Arts framework can achieve the “dual goals” of linguistic competence cultivation and value guidance, providing empirical support for the reform of foreign language education in the New Liberal Arts era.

Keywords: New Liberal Arts; Comprehensive English; Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education (CIPE); Action Research; Foreign Language Teaching

Introduction

In 2018, the Ministry of Education of China proposed the “New Liberal Arts” construction initiative, aiming to promote the innovation of liberal arts education by integrating emerging technologies, responding to national strategic needs, and strengthening the cultivation of students’ ideological and cultural literacy ^[1]. As an important component of liberal arts education, foreign language education is not only a tool for cross-cultural communication but also a carrier for spreading excellent culture and shaping correct values. However, traditional Comprehensive English courses—designed to develop students’ listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills—have long been criticized for overemphasizing linguistic form while neglecting value guidance and cultural confidence cultivation ^[4]. Against this backdrop, the “Guidance on Deepening the Construction of Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education in Colleges and Universities” ^[9] clearly requires that all courses, including foreign language courses, should “shoulder the responsibility of ideological and political education” and achieve the organic integration of “knowledge impartment” and “value guidance”. Thus, exploring how to integrate CIPE into Comprehensive English courses under the New Liberal Arts background has become an urgent task for foreign language educators. The core principles of the “New Liberal Arts” concretize and transform the ideological and political education in English majors by abandoning single-language-centric teaching and strengthening interdisciplinary integration, shifting it from “superficial moralizing” to “value embedding” and from “Western-centrism” to “Sino-Western mutual learning”. There are three key changes in practice: 1. Curriculum Restructuring: It moves beyond just teaching British and American literature, integrating cases like the English translations of *A Dream of Red Mansions* and the international communication practices of Chinese enterprises. This enables students to “tell Chinese stories in English”, fostering both linguistic competence and value guidance. 2. Perspective Shift: The teaching perspective transitions from “admiring the West” to “equal dialogue”. For example, when analyzing China-related reports in Western media, students are guided to identify biases with critical thinking and practice explaining China’s stance objectively in English, enhancing cultural confidence. 3. Practical Extension: Aligning with the “industry-education integration” requirement of the New Liberal Arts, ideological and political elements are integrated into practical courses such as cross-border e-commerce and international organization internships. This allows students to sharpen their language skills while establishing bottom-line thinking (e.g., integrity in cross-border trade) during simulated international communications.



Literature Review

2.1 Research on New Liberal Arts

The concept of "New Liberal Arts" originated from the United States in the late 20th century, emphasizing the integration of liberal arts with science, technology, and social sciences to address complex global issues ^[1]. In China, the New Liberal Arts initiative has been further localized, with a focus on three core orientations: disciplinary integration (e.g., combining foreign language studies with international relations, digital humanities), value leadership (e.g., cultivating students' national identity and global competence), and social relevance (e.g., aligning education with national strategies such as "the Belt and Road Initiative") ^[12].

In the field of foreign language education, scholars have argued that the New Liberal Arts requires foreign language courses to move beyond "instrumentalism" and construct a "three-in-one" teaching system of "language skills, cultural literacy, and ideological values" ^[7]. However, most existing studies remain at the theoretical discussion level, lacking empirical research on specific course implementation.

2.2 Research on Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education (CIPE)

CIPE is a Chinese characteristic educational concept that aims to integrate ideological and political elements into all courses to achieve the "synergy" of ideological and political education and professional education ^[3]. In foreign language education, research on CIPE has mainly focused on two aspects:

Element Mining: Scholars have explored how to extract ideological elements from foreign language textbooks, such as patriotism from texts about Chinese culture, environmental awareness from passages on ecological protection, and social responsibility from articles on global poverty ^[10].

Teaching Mode Innovation: Some studies have proposed teaching modes such as "theme-based integration" (linking textbook themes with ideological topics) and "task-based integration" (designing practical tasks to convey values) ^[13].

However, these studies have two limitations: first, they rarely connect CIPE with the New Liberal Arts framework, ignoring the requirements of interdisciplinary integration and digitalization; second, most studies lack long-term tracking and quantitative analysis, making their conclusions less generalizable.

2.3 Research on Comprehensive English Courses

Comprehensive English is a core compulsory course for non-English majors in China, focusing on improving students' comprehensive language application ability. Traditional teaching models of this course are often "text-centered", with teachers explaining grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structures, while students passively accept knowledge ^[8]. In recent years, with the promotion of CIPE, some teachers have begun to integrate ideological elements into teaching, but problems such as "superficial integration" (e.g., simply adding ideological slogans) and "disconnection between language and values" (e.g., overemphasizing values while neglecting language practice) still exist ^[5].

To sum up, existing research has laid a foundation for the integration of CIPE into Comprehensive English courses, but there is a lack of empirical studies that systematically combine the New Liberal Arts background, design scientific implementation paths, and verify the effectiveness of integration. This study aims to fill this gap.

2.4 Research on Ideological and Political Education in Integrated English Courses Under New Liberal Arts

Under the New Liberal Arts initiative, ideological and political (Ideological-Political) integration in Integrated English courses has become a key research focus, marking a shift from "skill-only" teaching to "value-embedded" education. Theoretical studies center on three pillars: Sino-Western mutual learning (abandoning Western-centrism to balance cultural identity and global perspective), interdisciplinary integration (combining linguistics with communication or AI), and whole-process education (leveraging the course's long duration for sustained value infiltration). Practical explorations focus on content reconstruction (supplementing Chinese cultural translation cases and enterprise international communication materials), interactive teaching (debates on Western media bias, "telling Chinese stories" speeches), and formative evaluation (including cultural comparison essays in assessments). Current dilemmas include teachers' insufficient interdisciplinary and Ideological-Political literacy, inadequate textbooks with systematic Chinese elements, and superficial cross-disciplinarity. Future research should prioritize teacher training, specialized textbook compilation, and in-depth empirical studies on long-term effectiveness.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted action research, which is suitable for solving practical problems in teaching and promoting the continuous improvement of teaching practice ^[6]. The research cycle included three stages: planning (designing CIPE-integrated teaching schemes), acting (implementing the schemes in the experimental group), and reflecting (adjusting the schemes based on preliminary results and conducting the next round of practice). The entire study lasted 16 weeks (one semester).

3.2 Research Subjects

The subjects were 86 first-year non-English major students from two parallel classes in a university in Jiangsu Province, China. The two classes were randomly assigned to the experimental group (43 students, 22 males and 21 females) and the control group (43 students, 23 males and 20 females). Before the experiment, a pre-test of language proficiency and a pre-questionnaire of ideological cognition were conducted, and the results showed no significant difference between the two groups ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the groups were comparable.

3.3 Research Tools

3.3.1 Teaching Schemes

Experimental Group: The teaching scheme was designed based on the New Liberal Arts concept, integrating CIPE elements into the textbook (New Horizon College English: Book 1) through three paths:

Theme-based Integration: Aligning textbook themes with ideological topics (e.g., linking the unit “Cultural Heritage” with “Chinese cultural confidence” and “protection of intangible cultural heritage”);

Interdisciplinary Integration: Introducing knowledge from other disciplines (e.g., using data from environmental science to discuss “China’s dual carbon goals” when teaching the unit “Environmental Protection”);

Digital Integration: Using online resources (e.g., short videos of “China’s Stories” on Bilibili, English reports on Xinhua News) to enrich teaching content and enhance students’ sense of participation.

Control Group: Traditional teaching schemes were used, focusing on explaining language points (grammar, vocabulary) and training basic language skills, with no intentional integration of CIPE elements.

3.3.2 Language Proficiency Test

The pre-test and post-test were designed based on the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) syllabus, covering reading comprehension (40 points), writing (30 points), and listening (30 points), with a total score of 100. The test papers were reviewed by two experienced college English teachers to ensure content validity and scoring reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.87$).

3.3.3 Ideological Cognition Questionnaire

The questionnaire was self-designed based on the goals of CIPE, including three dimensions: cultural confidence (5 items, e.g., “I am proud of China’s traditional culture”), social responsibility (5 items, e.g., “I am willing to contribute to solving social problems”), and cross-cultural awareness (5 items, e.g., “I can objectively evaluate the differences between Chinese and Western cultures”). The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The reliability and validity tests showed that Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.82$, and the KMO value = 0.78, indicating good reliability and validity.

3.3.4 Semi-structured Interviews

After the experiment, 10 students from the experimental group (5 with high scores, 3 with medium scores, 2 with low scores) and 2 English teachers were selected for semi-structured interviews. The interview outline included questions such as “How do you feel about the integration of ideological elements into English classes?” and “What difficulties did you encounter in integrating CIPE into teaching?” Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes and was recorded and transcribed for qualitative analysis.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection: Pre-test and pre-questionnaire were conducted in the first week of the semester; post-test and post-questionnaire were conducted in the 16th week; interviews were conducted in the 17th week.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data (test scores and questionnaire results) were analyzed using SPSS 26.0, including descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests; qualitative data (interview transcripts) were coded and themed using Nvivo 12.0 to extract core viewpoints.

Results

4.1 Results of Language Proficiency Test

Table 1 shows the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores between the experimental group and the control group.

Group	Test Type	Reading (Mean±SD)	Writing (Mean±SD)	Listening (Mean±SD)	Total (Mean±SD)	t-value	p-value
Experimental	Pre-test	28.6±4.2	18.3±3.5	19.2±3.8	66.1±8.7	0.32	0.75
Control	Pre-test	27.9±4.5	17.8±3.7	18.9±4.1	64.6±9.2	-	-
Experimental	Post-test	34.8±3.9	24.5±3.2	25.1±3.4	84.4±7.5	4.89	<0.01
Control	Post-test	30.2±4.3	20.1±3.6	21.5±3.9			

As shown in Table 1, there was no significant difference in the pre-test scores between the two groups ($p = 0.75$). After 16 weeks of teaching, the post-test scores of both groups improved, but the experimental group’s scores in reading, writing, listening, and total score were significantly higher than those of the control group ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that integrating CIPE into Comprehensive English courses not only does not hinder the improvement of students’ language proficiency but also promotes it—possibly because the ideological elements make the teaching content more relevant and interesting, stimulating students’ enthusiasm for learning.

4.2 Results of Ideological Cognition Questionnaire

Table 2 shows the comparison of pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire scores between the two groups.

Group	Test Type	Cultural Confidence (Mean±SD)	Social Responsibility (Mean±SD)	Cross-cultural Awareness (Mean±SD)	Total (Mean±SD)	t-value	p-value
Experimental	Pre-test	3.2±0.6	3.1±0.5	3.0±0.7	3.1±0.5	0.25	0.80
Control	Pre-test	3.1±0.7	3.0±0.6	2.9±0.8	3.0±0.6	-	-
Experimental	Post-test	4.3±0.5	4.2±0.4	4.1±0.6	4.2±0.4	6.37	<0.01

Group	Test Type	Cultural Confidence (Mean±SD)	Social Responsibility (Mean±SD)	Cross-cultural Awareness (Mean±SD)	Total (Mean±SD)	t-value	p-value
Control	Post-test	3.3±0.6	3.2±0.5	3.1±0.7	3.2±0.5	-	-

Table 2 shows that the pre-questionnaire scores of the two groups were not significantly different ($p = 0.80$). After the experiment, the experimental group's scores in all three dimensions (cultural confidence, social responsibility, cross-cultural awareness) were significantly higher than those of the control group ($p < 0.01$). For example, the experimental group's cultural confidence score increased from 3.2 to 4.3, indicating that the integration of CIPE effectively enhanced students' recognition of Chinese culture and values.

4.3 Results of Semi-structured Interviews

4.3.1 Students' Attitudes

Through coding the interview transcripts, three core themes emerged:

Enhanced Learning Interest: One student said, "When we discussed 'China's high-speed rail development' in English class, I not only learned new words like 'intercity railway' but also felt proud of China's technological progress. This made me more willing to participate in class discussions."

Deeper Cultural Understanding: A student with medium scores mentioned, "Before, I thought Western culture was better, but after analyzing the differences between Chinese and Western family values in class, I realized the importance of filial piety in Chinese culture. Now I can communicate with foreign friends about Chinese culture more confidently."

Practical Value Perception: A low-score student noted, "The teacher asked us to write an English essay about 'my dream of serving the country', which made me think about my future career. This is more meaningful than just writing a simple narrative."

4.3.2 Teachers' Attitudes

The two teachers generally recognized the effectiveness of CIPE integration but also pointed out challenges:

Positive Feedback: "Integrating ideological elements into textbook themes makes the course more connotative. Students are more active in class, and their writing content is more substantial."

Challenges: "It is difficult to balance language teaching and ideological guidance—sometimes I spend too much time on ideological discussion, leading to insufficient language practice. In addition, teachers need to continuously learn about national policies and interdisciplinary knowledge to design high-quality CIPE activities."

5. Conclusion

5.1 Main Findings

This study explores the integration of CIPE into Comprehensive English courses under the New Liberal Arts background, and the main findings are as follows:

Effective Integration Paths: Under the New Liberal Arts framework, CIPE can be integrated into Comprehensive English courses through three paths: theme-based integration (aligning textbook themes with ideological topics), interdisciplinary integration (combining language teaching with other disciplines), and digital integration (using online resources to enrich teaching content).

Dual Improvement of Competence and Literacy: The integration of CIPE significantly improves students' language proficiency (reading, writing, listening) and ideological literacy (cultural confidence, social responsibility, cross-cultural awareness), realizing the "dual goals" of foreign language education.

Positive Attitudes from Stakeholders: Most students and teachers hold positive attitudes towards CIPE integration, believing that it enhances learning interest and course connotation, though teachers face challenges in balancing language teaching and ideological guidance.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Theoretical Implications

This study enriches the theoretical system of New Liberal Arts and foreign language education by constructing a feasible framework for CIPE integration. It also verifies that the "instrumental" and "humanistic" functions of foreign language courses are not contradictory but can be mutually promoted.

5.2.2 Practical Implications

For Teachers: Teachers should strengthen their learning of New Liberal Arts concepts and national policies, improve their ability to identify and integrate ideological elements, and pay attention to the balance between language practice and value guidance.

For Universities: Universities should provide training and resource support for teachers (e.g., organizing CIPE teaching workshops, building digital resource libraries of "China's Stories in English") to promote the large-scale application of CIPE in foreign language courses.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study has two limitations: first, the research subjects are from a single university, and the sample size is small, so the conclusions need to be verified by larger-scale studies; second, the study lasts only one semester, and the long-term effect of CIPE integration needs to be tracked.

Future research can be expanded in the following directions: 1) expanding the sample to include students from different regions and majors to improve the generalizability of conclusions; 2) exploring the integration of CIPE into other foreign language courses (e.g., Academic English, English for Specific Purposes) under the New Liberal Arts background; 3) developing a quantitative evaluation index system for CIPE in foreign language courses to provide more scientific evaluation tools for teaching practice.

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