
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Research on the Integration Pathways of Ideological and Political Education in Vocational Foreign Language Courses

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ABSTRACT

With the advancement of high-level professional cluster development, integrating ideological and political education (IPE) elements into vocational foreign language courses has become a crucial task in the current reform of vocational education. This study, using the course “English Practical Writing” within the Applied English professional cluster as an example, explores the principles and pathways for implementing IPE within the framework of high-level professional cluster development. Firstly, this paper analyzes the demands placed on curriculum construction by high-level professional cluster initiatives, emphasizing that courses should integrate seamlessly into the overall professional cluster structure to cultivate essential qualities, such as cross-cultural communication skills, professional competence, and cultural confidence. Secondly, based on the Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Curricula, this study proposes optimizing course design by aligning it with career development and business processes. This approach enables students to acquire practical writing skills in English while fostering patriotism and social responsibility. Lastly, the study identifies five key areas for implementing IPE within the Applied English cluster: goal setting for IPE, development of interdisciplinary cultural content, progressive course design, project-based learning, and a multi-dimensional evaluation system. The aim of this research is to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for IPE integration in vocational foreign language courses, promoting a deep fusion of curriculum content with ideological and political education.

KEYWORDS

high-level professional cluster; ideological and political education; vocational foreign language course; English practical writing; cultural confidence

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1. Introduction

With the continuous deepening of vocational education reform in China, the construction of high-level professional clusters has emerged as a significant developmental direction within the vocational education system. The development of professional clusters not only emphasizes the optimization and integration of the specialized curriculum system but also requires the incorporation of ideological and political education (IPE) to comprehensively enhance students' ideological, political literacy, and professional ethics. This approach aims to cultivate high-quality, application-oriented talents who are attuned to societal needs. Against this backdrop, embedding IPE elements into vocational foreign language courses—especially through specific courses like English Practical Writing—is not only a response to the national mandate of “moral education” but also a concrete pathway for realizing the holistic educational objectives of vocational education (Zhao & Zhang, 2021). Consequently, effectively integrating IPE elements, constructing a systematic IPE framework, and enhancing the educational efficacy of courses have become core issues in the development of vocational foreign language curricula.

As an essential component of vocational colleges' efforts to cultivate application-oriented talent, vocational foreign language courses bear not only the responsibility of imparting language skills but also the mission of fostering students' cross-cultural communication abilities, cultural identity, and social responsibility. The English Practical Writing course, in particular, has a high degree of practicality and openness, offering ample opportunity for the integration of IPE elements. By embedding IPE content within business correspondence, contracts, reports, and other writing scenarios, students are not only able to improve their professional skills but also cultivate a correct set of values and a strong sense of responsibility in their communication and expression (Liu et al., 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to closely integrate the English Practical Writing course with IPE, exploring how to effectively realize the ideological and political functions of vocational foreign language courses from the perspective of high-level professional cluster development.

This study is based on the requirements outlined in the Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Curricula, approaching the Applied English professional cluster as the focal point and using the English Practical Writing course as the entry point. It proposes a theoretical framework for systematically constructing IPE pathways across curriculum objectives, content, teaching methods, and evaluation systems. Through analyzing and drawing on the professional cluster curriculum system construction concepts, this study proposes IPE pathways suitable for the English Practical Writing course, striving to achieve the threefold educational goal of "value shaping, knowledge transmission, and ability development" and providing feasible theoretical support and practical examples for IPE integration in high-level professional clusters.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Relationship Between Professional Cluster Development and Curriculum Construction

Since the initiation of high-level professional cluster development, rethinking curriculum construction from a professional cluster perspective has garnered sustained attention as a significant topic of discussion. The development of high-level professional clusters places new demands on individual course construction. When viewed from the height and perspective of a professional cluster, the purpose, tasks, and expected outcomes of curriculum construction must align with the professional teaching requirements and talent development standards of the cluster. Wang (2022) argued that innovations in talent cultivation models within high-level professional clusters necessitate the integration of the "five educations" to establish a vertically and horizontally interconnected professional cluster curriculum system characterized by "shared foundations, differentiated middle levels, and selective high levels." Currently, abandoning isolated approaches and adopting strategies for collaboration to integrate course construction into the broader development of the cluster and associated disciplines has become a shared objective in curriculum construction. Jin (2022) emphasized that planning curricula based on the professional cluster is a primary concern in course development.

Consequently, within the framework of professional cluster development, reconsidering course construction involves identifying new pathways and methods. These pathways should be based on disciplinary logic, cognitive patterns, and talent cultivation needs, with an emphasis on imparting professional knowledge and developing comprehensive abilities (Lu, 2017). This approach should expand from specific elements to broader connections, with increased attention to the relationships among courses. Such relationships encompass both the vertical and horizontal integration of IPE content. Drawing on the model of integrated IPE development across different educational levels, this approach organizes teaching content and its sequencing from the overall perspective of the professional cluster.

2.2 Ideological and Political Education in Foreign Language Courses

The Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Curricula state that IPE should be integrated into classroom teaching across all subjects. Embedding IPE elements into vocational foreign language courses is essential for fulfilling the fundamental mission of moral education and fostering a new holistic educational framework. Since the publication of these guidelines, research on IPE in foreign language courses has progressively deepened. Zhao and Zhang (2021) proposed two principles: restructuring teaching content with a thematic focus and balancing both Chinese and Western cultural content. Jin (2022) suggested that the implementation framework for IPE in foreign language courses can be divided into four "political chains" along the horizontal dimension, the first being the content chain, which emphasizes identifying IPE elements within foreign language teaching content. Li and Fu (2020) noted that the design of IPE teaching objectives in foreign languages should prioritize precision. Liu et al. (2023) examined the adoption of a multi-outline approach in English textbook compilation, integrating socialist core values within the curricular framework.

From the perspective of high-level professional cluster development, IPE in vocational foreign language courses should be anchored in the cluster while focusing on individual courses as entry points. The integration pathways, content, and formats of IPE must reflect the distinctive characteristics of the cluster. This study aims to introduce the concepts, content, and methods of professional cluster development into IPE construction in the English Practical Writing course, exploring new perspectives and approaches for IPE in foreign language courses to contribute to advancements in this area.

3. Principles of Integrating IPE in the "English Practical Writing" Course

3.1 Aligning with the Talent Cultivation Goals of Professional Clusters

The Applied English professional cluster is committed to serving the economic and social development needs of the region, providing skilled talent for industries such as foreign trade, domestic trade, tourism, and e-commerce. This commitment requires students to possess robust written and oral communication skills in both Chinese and English, cross-cultural communication competencies, and business management abilities. The cluster aligns with the modern service sector, which focuses on business and trade, aiming to develop students' comprehensive qualities, including patriotism, accurate ideological perspectives, adherence to the "Four Confidences" (with a particular emphasis on cultural confidence), and an understanding of national macroeconomic policies. Accordingly, the IPE focus within the English Practical Writing course emphasizes fostering students' ability to write proficiently in both English and Chinese, particularly in business contexts, where they must not only express themselves accurately in English but also uphold and actively apply correct Chinese expressions, following principles of self-reliance, linguistic equivalence, and effective communication.

Therefore, the IPE construction goals of this course include imparting English writing knowledge as a core task, complemented by modern Chinese expression skills. The specific objective is to cultivate students' English writing abilities while simultaneously nurturing a proficient, standardized form of Chinese writing. Ultimately, the course aims to instill values of self-actualization, social contribution, and exemplary behavior in students, training a new generation of socialist youth with aspirations for societal impact. This IPE instructional design targets "value shaping, knowledge imparting, and skills development" as a tripartite educational goal. In practice, this approach focuses on two main areas:

Career Development and Business Processes as a Central Theme: By integrating typical business scenarios, the course design is optimized to offer students an immersive experience, familiarizing them with job requirements and key responsibilities. From job interviews, company and product orientation, to understanding business processes and handling responsibilities, the course progressively builds on professional knowledge while cultivating a disciplined work ethic and a sense of national responsibility. Additionally, the course enhances cross-cultural communication skills, encouraging students to share China's narrative effectively within a business framework.

Contrastive Learning in Linguistic and Cultural Elements: By comparing linguistic characteristics, language logic, expression habits, writing styles, and traditions in English and Chinese business writing, the course uncovers relevant IPE elements, helping students understand the rich heritage of Chinese business traditions and writing. Learning English Practical Writing aims to facilitate effective written communication with English-speaking clients, with the goal of ensuring that cultural values, traditions, and IPE elements guide students toward equal, rather than accommodating, cross-cultural exchanges. Students are encouraged to actively convey China's language, culture, and values in their communication.

3.2 Construction Positioning and Logic

Traditional course construction generally focuses on clearly defined boundaries and intrinsic content, structured around internal logic and subject knowledge. However, course construction from a high-level professional cluster perspective builds upon this approach by emphasizing the relationships, collaboration, complementarity, and substitutability between courses. The formation of a professional cluster curriculum involves three main types of logic: industrial logic, job-specific logic, and knowledge-based logic (Hu & Li, 2018). These logics define the curriculum content based on job tasks and work processes, organizing courses into modular curricula.

Taking the Applied English professional cluster as an example, the sub-specialties within this cluster include Business English, Applied English, Tourism English, and Cross-Border E-Commerce, with the unifying aim of training interdisciplinary talent for the modern service sector. Core courses across these sub-specialties include Business English, English Chinese Translation, Cross-Cultural Communication, Tourism English, Hospitality English, Cross-Border E-Commerce English, Exhibition English, and International Trade Practices. Given the four-pronged model of "job-course-competition-certification" for talent development in higher vocational education, and the alignment of professional courses with real industry practices, the English Practical Writing course content inevitably overlaps in terms of modules, scenarios, and knowledge areas.

According to Collins et al. (2014), course content design should address two main aspects: selecting suitable content for constructing the course, and sequencing the selected content appropriately. In terms of IPE construction, the English Practical Writing course should break away from conventional, isolated course-building approaches and undergo necessary adjustments within the broader vision of professional cluster development. The course's function within the cluster curriculum system should be clarified, identifying the educational logic that connects it with related courses. This approach sequences the IPE content strategically within the overall framework, combining specific elements, lines, and broad networks, integrating IPE comprehensively into the cluster curriculum system.

4. Pathways for IPE Integration in the "English Practical Writing" Course

In the framework of high-level professional cluster development, integrating ideological and political education (IPE) into courses like English Practical Writing requires a multi-dimensional, layered approach. This approach ensures that course content is systematically organized, avoids unnecessary repetition, and enhances the complementarity between related courses. Anchored in the goals of professional cultivation, this integration combines interdisciplinary cultural education, progressive course design, project-based teaching methods, and a multidimensional evaluation system. Together, these strategies foster structured, interconnected courses, minimize overlaps, and provide comprehensive support for students' holistic growth. Not only does this approach help students acquire essential language skills relevant to their professions, but it also builds a foundation of values, guiding them to become socially responsible, culturally aware, and globally oriented individuals.

Specifically, the IPE framework for this course has been thoroughly explored through five major pathways: aligning IPE objectives with professional training goals, building a cultural content system, implementing tiered course designs, applying project-based teaching, and establishing multidimensional evaluations. The following sections expand on each pathway with more depth, theoretical context, and practical examples to illustrate their applications.

4.1 Aligning IPE Objectives with Professional Training Goals

In a high-level professional cluster, aligning IPE objectives with professional training goals in courses like English Practical Writing involves addressing the unique needs of talent cultivation in various subfields. Each field may require a tailored approach to embedding IPE content. For instance, in Business English, the thematic exploration of "Corporate Responsibility in the Context of Globalization" offers an effective entry point for incorporating IPE (Welford, 2002). By studying multinational corporations' social responsibility (CSR) efforts, students learn to view business activities within the broader context of cultural and ethical expectations. This not only improves their language skills in specialized contexts but also deepens their understanding of ethical standards and business roles in a multicultural environment.

Moreover, such an approach equips students with the skills needed to critically assess CSR cases, which in turn fosters an inclusive and socially responsible perspective. Through analyzing CSR initiatives and the varied responses of local communities, students can develop cultural awareness, gaining insight into the complexities of operating across diverse social landscapes. This contributes to the broader educational goal of developing students' critical thinking skills, enabling them to navigate complex ethical dilemmas with cultural sensitivity and social awareness.

For students in Tourism English, the IPE framework could center around China's international image and the global influence of Chinese culture. By examining the impact of policies like the 144-hour visa-free policy, which has led to an increase in foreign tourists visiting China, students can explore the international ramifications of cultural exchange. Analyzing this policy allows students to consider how national policies influence global perceptions of China and to reflect on how such exchanges shape both cultural identity and national pride. This exploration builds an appreciation for cultural diversity, preparing students to engage with visitors from different backgrounds with an informed and respectful perspective.

Through such alignments, students can bridge IPE objectives with specific professional competencies, making them not only adept in professional communication but also aware of their roles as cultural ambassadors. This alignment fosters both their linguistic capabilities and their ability to convey cultural values in meaningful ways.

4.2 Building an Interdisciplinary Cultural Content System to Enhance Cultural Confidence

The integration of IPE within English Practical Writing courses must prioritize the cultivation of cultural confidence (Wang, 2022), which is essential for students working in global and multicultural contexts. Building an interdisciplinary cultural content system allows IPE to engage students by drawing from both local and international cultural frameworks. By comparing Confucian values, which emphasize community and social harmony, with Western ideals of individualism and self-reliance, students gain a nuanced understanding of cultural differences and commonalities. This approach deepens their respect for Chinese cultural heritage and enhances their ability to communicate confidently in cross-cultural situations.

Classic case studies are especially valuable in teaching this comparative approach. By engaging with well-documented cultural narratives and historical precedents, students can develop a more profound respect for their heritage. This process builds not only cultural knowledge but also confidence in expressing Chinese values in global dialogues. For example, by studying the influence of Confucian ethics on modern Chinese business practices, students learn to recognize and articulate these values in professional English, which is essential for effective communication in international business settings.

Furthermore, such an interdisciplinary approach helps students recognize the interconnectedness of cultural and ideological frameworks. By understanding cultural heritage as an evolving concept influenced by various historical and ideological forces, students are better prepared to engage with global peers while remaining grounded in their own cultural identity. This cultural

confidence becomes a significant asset in professional settings, where intercultural communication skills and cultural pride contribute to more authentic and impactful exchanges.

4.3 Progressive IPE Education Through Tiered Course Design

A progressive approach to IPE in the English Practical Writing course allows for the development of ideological and political themes that evolve across course modules, moving from basic to advanced concepts. Tiered course design provides a scaffolded structure where students gradually encounter increasingly complex themes, enhancing both their understanding and critical engagement with IPE content.

In introductory modules, focusing on writing formats and structural rules, IPE elements could emphasize fundamental knowledge and expressions related to Chinese cultural norms. Students are introduced to basic concepts of cultural identity and collective values, laying the groundwork for more advanced discussions. This focus on foundational IPE themes ensures that students develop a strong basis for understanding broader ideological concepts as they progress through the course.

As students advance to modules on company and product introductions, global issues, such as environmental sustainability and social justice, could be introduced. These topics encourage students to think critically about the global implications of business practices and the role of companies in addressing social challenges. For example, students could analyze how companies in various industries are responding to environmental concerns, which fosters an understanding of ethical responsibility within a professional context.

In the final modules, such as those focused on business contracts, complaints, and claims, the emphasis could shift to ethical decision-making and social accountability in international relations. This level of tiered course design enables students to engage with complex, real-world challenges that require not only linguistic precision but also a sound understanding of ethical principles and cultural expectations. Through this process, students gain a comprehensive view of how ideological values intersect with professional practices, reinforcing the holistic aims of IPE.

4.4 Implementing Project-Based Teaching to Integrate IPE Elements in Professional Contexts

Project-based teaching is an effective approach for merging practical professional skills with IPE elements, as it provides students with opportunities to apply their learning in simulated real-world situations (Miller et al., 2021). For instance, a “Simulated International Negotiation Project” designed for the “Product Introduction” unit can allow students to embody the roles of multinational company representatives and engage in exercises such as negotiating trade terms, making investment decisions, and addressing ethical dilemmas.

By engaging in this simulated negotiation, students not only develop essential communication and negotiation skills but also encounter the practical challenges of balancing business objectives with ethical considerations. This experience encourages students to think critically about the responsibilities of multinational corporations and the potential consequences of their actions on local and global communities. It also highlights the importance of cultural understanding in international negotiations, as students must navigate differences in cultural expectations and communication styles.

Additionally, such projects require students to consider both national interests and corporate ethics, fostering greater awareness of their role as representatives of Chinese culture in international settings. This project-based approach strengthens students’ capacity for moral reasoning and helps them develop a balanced perspective on economic and ethical priorities, preparing them to navigate complex professional landscapes with integrity.

4.5 Establishing a Multidimensional Evaluation System to Measure IPE Outcomes

An essential component of IPE integration in vocational courses is a comprehensive evaluation system that assesses both students’ language proficiency and the effectiveness of IPE outcomes. A multidimensional evaluation system in the English Practical Writing course allows educators to measure students’ progress across several domains, ensuring that both technical and ideological competencies are adequately developed.

For instance, evaluation methods could include reflective essays, in which students express their understanding of cultural and ethical issues, and analyses of cultural case studies, where students demonstrate their ability to apply IPE principles in specific contexts. Such assignments encourage students to actively engage with the content, internalize ideological values, and develop critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, this multidimensional evaluation system allows for a nuanced assessment of student growth, recognizing the development of cultural awareness, ethical reflection, and professional skills. By including IPE as a core component of student

assessment, this approach emphasizes the importance of ideological education within the vocational training framework, promoting a balanced and comprehensive approach to student development.

5. Conclusion

Language is a tool for thought, a vessel for culture, and a carrier of values. Language instruction, including English Practical Writing, holds a unique capacity for ideological and political education (IPE), with its high degree of permeability and inherent ideological value, particularly when embedded within high-level professional clusters for foreign languages. This quality allows language courses to amplify the impact and dynamism of IPE. This paper uses the English Practical Writing course as an example to explore overarching principles and concrete pathways for single-course construction from the perspective of a high-level Applied English professional cluster.

The construction of a professional cluster curriculum system must be guided by talent development objectives, coordinating logical connections among various disciplines and courses to achieve a complementary and mutually reinforcing effect. From this perspective, building an individual course, especially in terms of IPE—requires a broader vision and a strategic approach. It involves not only clarifying the internal content and objectives of each course but also understanding the sequence and integration of courses across the curriculum. From this standpoint, every course, including its ideological and political elements, represents a comprehensive endeavor. Only by recognizing the integrative nature of course construction can we build effective courses, cultivate qualified talent, and contribute to the high-quality development of the nation.

While this study provides a systematic framework and practical pathways for integrating IPE into the *English Practical Writing* course, certain limitations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the theoretical propositions and frameworks proposed here are primarily based on a limited sample of vocational institutions and courses. As such, the findings may not fully generalize to all contexts, particularly those in non-vocational or international education settings. Secondly, the implementation of IPE pathways has been illustrated primarily through examples and theoretical constructs, with limited empirical validation or longitudinal data to substantiate their effectiveness in diverse learning environments. Lastly, the study focuses on a single course within the Applied English cluster, leaving the potential for integration across multiple courses or clusters underexplored.

Future research should aim to empirically validate the proposed pathways for integrating ideological and political education (IPE) into vocational curricula. Rigorous longitudinal studies can examine the impact of these pathways on fostering students' ideological awareness, cultural confidence, and professional skills. Such research would measure tangible outcomes in diverse learning environments, evaluating whether these strategies effectively align with broader educational goals. It is also essential to identify specific elements within the IPE framework that most significantly contribute to these outcomes, ensuring that future implementations are both efficient and impactful.

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