

Research on the integration of moral education into ESP teaching

Yuping Fu¹, Zongjie Zhang^{2*}

¹School of Foreign Languages, Hainan Tropical Ocean University, Sanya, Hainan, China

²School of Science, Hainan Tropical Ocean University, Sanya, Hainan, China

ABSTRACT

As an important part of college English education, the exploration of moral integration into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses holds significant practical significance for the construction of moral integration into college English courses. This paper systematically reviews the current research trends in foreign language moral integration in China and finds that substantial research achievements have been made both at the macro-theoretical level and in reform practices. However, most studies on moral education integration into English courses focus on English for General Purposes (EGP) or language skills courses for English majors, while research themed around moral integration into ESP courses is relatively scarce. The author argues that subsequent research should further advance the construction of ESP course clusters for moral education integration, systematically develop high-quality teaching materials, explore appropriate teaching models and evaluation systems, and promote the achievement of the three-tiered educational objectives of knowledge impartation, ability cultivation, and value guidance within the relatively limited training period.

KEYWORDS

ESP teaching; moral education, literature review

1 Introduction

In May 2020, China's Ministry of Education issued the Guidelines for the Construction of moral education Courses in universities and colleges, which clearly proposes to deeply explore various moral education resources in the teaching process, comprehensively promote the integration of moral education into courses and give full play to the educational role of each course. Integrating value-orientation guidance into knowledge imparting and ability cultivation is the teaching requirement of moral education in courses. Foreign languages serve as essential elements for knowledge acquisition, competence development, and the expression of thoughts. They carry cultural connotations and thinking patterns, function as significant carriers of moral education in curriculum and constitute fundamental courses for "cultivating integrity and forging souls" ^[1]. The "Guidelines for moral Teaching in College Foreign Language Courses", launched by College Foreign Language Teaching Guidance Committee of Tertiary Institutions in 2022, explicitly define the key contents of moral teaching in college foreign language courses from five aspects: political identity, love for the country and family, cultural literacy, professional knowledge, and moral cultivation^[2].

Scholars and researchers in China have explored moral education in English courses from multiple perspectives. In order to understand and grasp the latest trends and developmental tendencies in this field, especially the integration of moral education into ESP courses and teaching, this study will systematically comb relevant literature based on the method of literature analysis and content analysis, aiming to provide important references and suggestions for deepening follow-up research and promoting the construction of moral education in China's foreign language courses.

2 Research of moral education in English teaching

2.1 Moral education in English teaching

Moral curriculum is a comprehensive educational concept. It takes the form of constructing an all-round, all-staff, and all-course education pattern to enable moral theory courses and various other courses to advance in the same direction and work in synergy, regarding the fundamental task of education as fostering virtue through education. It aims to connect students' moral education with their value concepts in the classroom and subtly influence students' thinking and behavior. Therefore, the primary goals of moral education are to foster virtue through education and collaborative education. China has always emphasized education that inherits the excellent traditional Chinese culture, especially the education of students' worldviews, outlooks on life, and values, guiding students to establish correct concepts and cultivating more all-round developed talents for society.

The integration of moral education into English teaching has its unique disciplinary characteristics. On the one hand,

* **Corresponding Author:** ZhangZongjie(zhangzongjie2006@163.com)

traditional English teaching goals are mainly reflected in improving students' comprehensive abilities of language application, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating. Moreover, previous English textbooks pursued "authentic flavor", resulting in a relative lack of moral content and a deficiency in content related to Chinese society and culture. On the other hand, English courses possess both instrumental and humanistic characteristics. Moral education in English courses can adopt an implicit approach in language teaching interactions, allowing students to be subtly influenced and thus establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values.

2.2 Research of moral education in English courses

The concept and practical exploration of moral education in foreign language courses originated from the construction path proposed by Zhao^[3], which combines the former with foreign language teaching. It has a strong demonstrative and guiding significance for related studies in Chinese universities. It has attracted high attention from experts, scholars, and frontline teachers in the field of foreign languages in China, giving rise to a series of research fruits on moral education in foreign language courses with high academic reference value. Subsequent studies have mainly explored from two levels: macro-theory and reform practice.

Theoretically, some scholars have explored the connotation and construction approaches of moral education in foreign language courses at the macro level. Others have analyzed the connotation and implementation approaches from the perspectives of talent cultivation, value guidance, national consciousness, core literacy, orientation and media nature, and college English respectively^[1,4-6]. Fostering virtue through education is the core of moral education in courses. Starting from core concepts such as talent cultivation, national consciousness and core literacy to the connotation interpretation can be said to have grasped the key to the topic. For example, Liu and Yue^[5] comprehensively expounded on the understanding of moral education in foreign language courses from the connotation of fostering virtue through education, the requirements and goals of related courses, and the reform approaches in college English courses. They also introduced the authors' specific teaching reform practices in combination with textbooks. Wen^[1] constructed a two-dimensional framework for moral education in college foreign language courses, both vertically and horizontally. The vertical dimension explains the profound understanding of moral education from a theoretical level, while the horizontal dimension designs four paths for the reform from an operational level: content, management, evaluation, and teaching staff, highlighting teachers' important role in the construction of moral education in courses.

At the level of reform practice, some studies have combined the characteristics of their respective disciplines. Translation majors and English majors^[4], etc. are all sharing practical experiences and conducting theoretical explorations on the construction of course groups with oral education features. Research related to specific courses covers a wide range of professional courses, including linguistics, business English, English listening, foreign literature, English-speaking countries' society and culture, cultural communication in English, communicative English, English newspaper and magazine reading, interpretation, and English writing^[7-8]. Among them, the most courses are from English majors, followed by translation majors and college English^[9-10]. In terms of content, professional courses involving cultural elements rank first in number^[11-12]. From the perspective of teaching process, there is the largest number of studies on teaching content, while only a few focus on evaluation and testing^[13-14] and still less on ESP teaching.

3 Importance of moral education in ESP teaching

3.1 ESP teaching and its relationship with moral education in curriculum

The Guidelines for College English Teaching (2020 edition) points out that college English courses include three major categories: EGP, ESP and intercultural communication courses. ESP emphasizes the combination of English skills and professional knowledge. It is market-oriented and competence-based. It often involves the development and practice of applied courses according to students' professional knowledge and specific English learning purposes, aiming to cultivate students' ability to apply English in specific professional environments.

The teaching philosophy of ESP teaching abroad originated in the 1960s. The relevant curriculum design emerged in response to the social needs and the development of the world economy at that time, aiming to cultivate the specialized talents required by the society. Later, based on needs analysis, Hutchinson and Waters^[15] put forward the ESP teaching concept of learner-centeredness to help students use English in work related to their careers and scientific research. Different from EGP, which emphasizes the language itself and focuses on the explanation of language knowledge and culture, the ESP teaching concept places more emphasis on "learning by doing"^[16], that is, emphasizing learning in a real-task environment.

ESP is closely linked to specialized content and offers greater advantages over traditional EGP in achieving curriculum-based moral education, enabling students to understand advanced science, technology, and professional knowledge from other countries through learning English, as well as the humanities and industry cultures around the world. ESP also

plays a more significant role in students' future academic and professional development. ESP courses disseminate knowledge with reference to specific fields of English use. This is explicit education aimed at cultivating talents with professional English proficiency. Curriculum-based moral education, on the other hand, serves as a guide for values. It is implicit education designed to guide college students to establish correct outlooks on life and values.

The teaching philosophy of ESP courses shares common ground with moral education, which is associated with many aspects of higher education, mainly guiding students to grow into useful talents serving the country from the perspectives of fostering virtue through education and promoting Chinese culture. Meanwhile, college English courses shoulder the important responsibility of leading students to acquire professional knowledge, develop language security awareness, and use what they have learned to serve the country. The design of ESP courses has always been adjusted continuously in accordance with the needs of the target context and learning requirements. The fostering virtue through education and the promotion of telling Chinese stories emphasized in moral education need to be implemented in specific classrooms. The teaching philosophy of ESP courses can lend a helping hand in this regard. Since dull imparting cannot achieve the desired effect. Only by designing projects and tasks in real target environments or using case studies can abstract concepts be integrated.

3.2 Role of ESP teaching in cultivating students' virtue through education

The fundamental task of fostering moral integrity and all-around development advocates for the reform of curriculum content, objectives, structures, and models. Through these reforms, students are guided to establish a sense of national identity and cultural confidence, and to develop sound personalities. ESP course design is closely related to professional knowledge, to acquire which, students should not only keep abreast of the latest technological advancements in their own country but also understand the frontier research in relevant fields both at home and abroad. They need to learn how to access international cutting-edge literature in English and master the skills of appropriate expression and communication. This is the original intention of offering English courses in universities^[17]. ESP course teaching does not involve the abstract instillation of language knowledge and culture. Instead, it emphasizes language learning in real-life scenarios, guiding students in moral education. This approach proves to be more effective than empty indoctrination.

The instructional design of ESP has always been closely related to national and social needs, as well as the target context. It is committed to guiding students to plan their majors and future career development, so as to master and improve their abilities of English language expression. By leveraging English, students can broaden their professional knowledge and enhance their capabilities in evaluating and identifying various types of information and knowledge. The learner-centered teaching philosophy of ESP encourages students to complete projects and tasks through cooperation and learn the language in this process. This approach benefits national development and meets social needs. Although the current economic strength of our country has attracted worldwide attention, there is still much room for improvement in soft power, especially in the appropriate communication methods with foreign counterparts. Misunderstandings caused by cultural differences in language expression often occur. For example, bilateral legal disputes in international trade and overseas media criticism of the speech act by Chinese enterprises or individuals. These misapprehensions are often due to a lack of cultural understanding of the target country, which fully demonstrates the significance of understanding the culture of the target country through language learning and communication. It is crucial to train students to express their ideas appropriately in English. This is precisely the original intention of ESP's emphasis on conducting language training based on target situation analysis and learning situation analysis, combined with professional knowledge.

3.3 Role of ESP teaching in promoting Chinese culture

Promoting Chinese culture is another goal of integrating moral education into courses. To achieve this, it is necessary to cultivate appropriate language communication skills. When promoting Chinese culture, it is essential to tell Chinese stories well through projects, tasks, or cases. For example, when explaining Chinese culture in tourism English courses, students are required to use English and combine their professional knowledge to express their demands and aspirations. This can be precisely achieved through the target situation analysis and application advocated in ESP course teaching. Student-centered course teaching emphasizes that English learning should take place in real-life contexts. ESP courses focus on the learning process and emphasize cultivating students' four abilities, namely, good language communication skills, critical thinking ability, creativity, and cooperation ability, which should be cultivated through projects, tasks, or cases, rather than merely imparting knowledge and skills.

Promoting Chinese culture can also be achieved by cultivating students' critical thinking and creative thinking abilities. For example, by setting real-world tasks, students can be guided to compare cultural differences and thinking patterns, conduct critical research on relevant domestic and foreign literature, and tell Chinese stories well. Only by fully understanding the cultural differences between China and the West (which are also reflected in academic research, such

as industry-specific cultural differences) can students enhance their critical thinking skills and better train their innovative thinking. ESP teaching emphasizes the cultivation of cooperation skills, advocating and encouraging students to complete classroom tasks, projects, or case studies collaboratively in groups. Therefore, ESP teaching based on students' needs can help them improve their four key skills and thereby contribute to the development of the country and society.

Promoting Chinese culture and telling Chinese stories well can also start from the perspective of national discourse competence. This is because national discourse competence lies at the core of national capabilities. It is the primary linguistic ability to clarify the subject and handle domestic and international affairs, as well as an important discourse ability for constructing a national image. An important indicator for measuring the level of national discourse competence is discourse power. For example, some Western countries led by the United States have dominated many commercial and technological issues, undermining China's interests. If China's professionals with both foreign language proficiency and expertise in specific fields (such as business, law, and other relevant majors) do not rely on translators to convey their wishes and demands, but possess appropriate foreign language comprehension and communication skills, China will be able to remain invincible in the world. This should be an issue that ESP course teaching focuses on, that is, emphasizing real scenarios rather than results based on needs analysis and combined with relevant majors.

In sum, ESP teaching should place equal emphasis on "moral education" and "curriculum-based talent cultivation". Against the backdrop of the new era, the integration of moral education into ESP courses has become a general trend with the proposal of the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, and the initiation of the construction of new liberal arts and great foreign languages.

4 Research of moral education in ESP teaching

Current research mainly focuses on EGP or language-skill-oriented courses for English majors, while research themed around moral education in ESP teaching is relatively scarce. A search on CNKI also shows that there are only a handful of relevant studies in core journals. The existing studies mainly focus on the teaching design, implementation approaches, and practical explorations of integrating moral content into some ESP courses. ESP courses cover areas such as business English, medical English, and academic English, etc. The teaching of ESP skills mainly centers around English writing, reading, and interpretation/translation. Additionally, there is one study on the exploration of the connotations of moral education in ESP courses and another on the compilation of ESP textbooks.

Firstly, guided by the theory of multiliteracies, Li and Feng^[18] took the online-offline blended course of economics English, a professional course integrating language and knowledge in business English, as the action research object. They explored how to organically integrate moral elements into specific teaching links, implement the educational concept of student-centeredness, outcome-oriented approach, and continuous improvement, and achieve three talent cultivation goals, i. e., the value shaping, knowledge imparting, and ability training. Liu and Lin^[19] constructed a theoretical framework for the moral education in business English from two aspects, namely moral education for moral cultivation and professional talent training, and five dimensions, namely moral individuals, Chinese people, modern people, basic abilities and professional abilities. This achieved the integration of moral education and professional teaching in top-level design. At the same time, they constructed an implementation path, which is teacher-led, student-centered and content-oriented, as well as three classroom teaching models, namely classroom discussion, practical research and project design, to promote the specific implementation of the theoretical framework for the moral education in the course. Under the guidance of the concept of moral education in courses, Tang et al.^[20] explored the specific methods of integrating moral elements into the teaching of business English listening and speaking courses: 1) Establish professional teaching objectives and moral goals for the course. 2) Cultivate students' growth - mindset and shape their tenacious characters. 3) Help students establish correct values. 4) Improve students' ability to distinguish right from wrong and enhance their cultural self-confidence and national pride. Teachers must play a crucial role in this process.

Secondly, Wang et al.^[21], based on practical teaching, fully explored the connotation essence, methods, and effects in the construction of moral courses in professional English of medical colleges. They organically integrated professional English education with moral education, helping to cultivate interdisciplinary medical talents and meeting the development needs of today's world and the Healthy China initiative. Ye et al.^[22] took the teaching reform of college English courses as an example. Through examples of unit teaching design, combined with the characteristics of the medical discipline, they carried out reforms on the teaching content, teaching methods, and evaluation models of the course. With knowledge as the support, ability as the goal, high-order thinking as the orientation, and cultural comparison as the approach, they aimed to achieve value shaping, ability improvement, knowledge accumulation, critical thinking cultivation, and the development of a global perspective.

Finally, Zhang^[8] comprehensively demonstrated the design of a hybrid teaching course for academic English writing integrated with moral education from the perspectives of teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching methods, and typical case analysis. Moreover, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was employed to verify

the teaching effectiveness. This study provides a certain paradigm for integrating moral education into hybrid teaching. Zhang et al.^[12] proposed an moral teaching model for English writing courses for English majors that focuses on telling Chinese stories well. This model is implemented through a trinity of teaching objectives, two supports, three consciousnesses, and one approach, along with diversified, process-oriented, and value-added evaluation methods. It delves deep into the moral elements in writing courses, aiming to achieve a high-level integration of value shaping, knowledge imparting, and ability cultivation. The study further takes the English writing course for freshmen majoring in English as an example to elaborate on the specific practical process and effects of this model. It can provide relevant insights for grasping the connotation of moral education in foreign language courses and scientifically designing moral teaching in foreign language courses.

All in all, due to space limitations, research related to the integration of moral education into ESP courses in interpretation and translation, textbook compilation, police English, and agricultural and forestry English will not be elaborated on here.

5 Conclusion

The construction of moral courses in foreign languages in Chinese universities is an inevitable requirement for achieving the goal of "fostering virtue through education". This paper systematically combs and summarizes the current research trends of moral courses in foreign languages in China. It is found that relevant research has made fruitful achievement both at the macro-theoretical and reform-practice levels. However, most of the research focuses on EGP for public course or language-skill-oriented courses for English majors, while research themed on ESP moral courses is relatively scarce. In addition, the construction of the curriculum group for English moral courses needs to be promoted. The compilation of systematic and high-quality textbooks is urgently needed, and the evaluation system also needs to be improved. To achieve the three-level training goals of knowledge imparting, ability cultivation, and value guidance within a relatively limited training period, it is not only necessary to promote the construction of the curriculum group and compile appropriate textbooks, but also further explore ways to optimize the teaching model and the evaluation system.

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