Need-based Construction and Application of Online Micro-lectures in Foreign Language Courses: Ethical and Cultural Considerations

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Abstract

The ethical and cultural education has been integrated into the educational reform programmes gradually in Chinese universities as an indispensable part, attempting to provide guidance in foreign language learning on account of its special characteristics, because language major students are easily affected by foreign culture and values they learned on classes when they form their values, it's essential for them to cultivate a right world view. The online micro-lectures, constructed based on the discourse analysis of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, make the integration possible. These micro-lectures combine ethical and cultural elements with translating strategies and skills, serving as online resources to facilitate classroom teaching. The paper aims to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of applying micro-lectures in teaching practice by collecting and analyzing the feedback and evaluations from students after a 2-month trial. Practice and investigation prove that micro-lectures combining ethical and cultural content with language knowledge is practical in the ethical and cultural construction of foreign language curriculum, which provides an effective idea for the exploration of integrating those elements into classrooms.

Keywords

Ethical and cultural education; Foreign language class; Integration path; Micro-lectures.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, it is an important task for university teachers to promote the "incorporation of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era into teaching materials, classrooms and minds". How to dig the value of ethical and cultural curriculum in classroom teaching is the focus of reform and innovation in foreign language education. Teachers should adhere to the principles of moral education, and introduce the content of ethical and cultural education to actively explore the effective path of its construction in courses.

Students not only act as "receivers" of information--they need to study a lot of foreign language professional materials during their school years, but also take on the role of "disseminators" of information in the future. As China is moving closer to the center of the world stage, there are an increasing number of people around the world who are paying attention to its development, it is essential that the rising generations learn to properly introduce China's ideas to the world in English, present true, comprehensive, objective and three-dimensional images of China. The youth can also tell a good story to spread a powerful voice and show China's wisdom to the world. *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* covers a wide range of materials suitable for civic education including various speeches by General Secretary Xi Jinping, covering major policies, ideological lines, economy and culture, construction achievements, and exchanges with other countries[1], which are of great value to students' learning and research. The integration with foreign courses may not only help students expand their knowledge, and improve their English

proficiency to become compound talents with professional ability as well as international vision; it also allows them to deepen their understanding of China's national affairs and livelihood, feel the major changes occurring in contemporary China, cultivate political awareness, enhance their thinking and discernment skills and safeguard China's national interests. How to integrate ethical and cultural elements into classroom teaching in a diversified way and improve students' receiving capacity has become a major problem faced by college foreign language teachers.

2. Need-based Integration of Ethical and Cultural Elements

During the preliminary survey, initially, the problems and suggestions of college students are understood by collecting and sorting out a large amount of literature on language learning. Public foreign languages are often not valued in colleges and face the risk of being marginalized. To collect more objective information from different groups, non-foreign language students were selected as the target group for the survey, and their opinions on the curriculum were investigated by questionnaires. A total of 58 valid questionnaires were sent out to the mechanical and electrical students class of 2022 from North China Electric Power University. The following findings are obtained from these questionnaires.

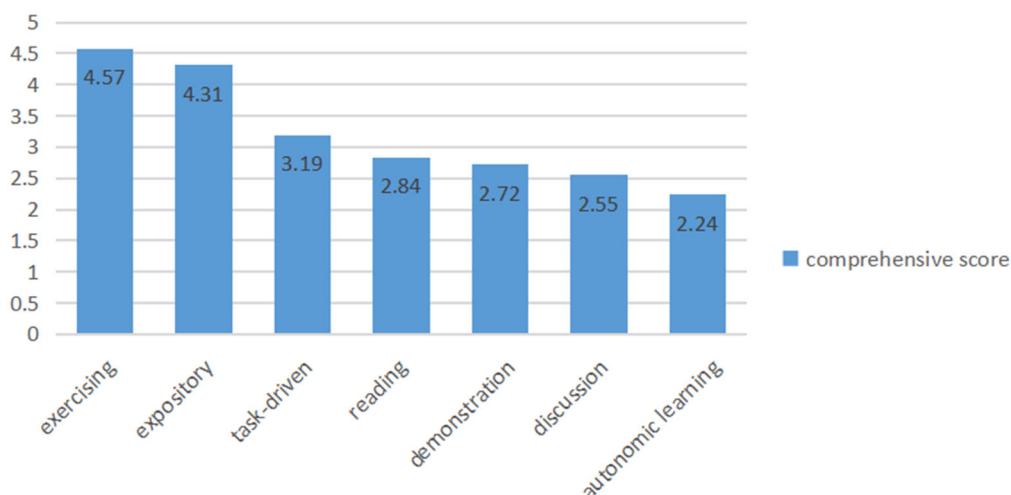### 2.1. Investigation of Students' Learning Method Preference

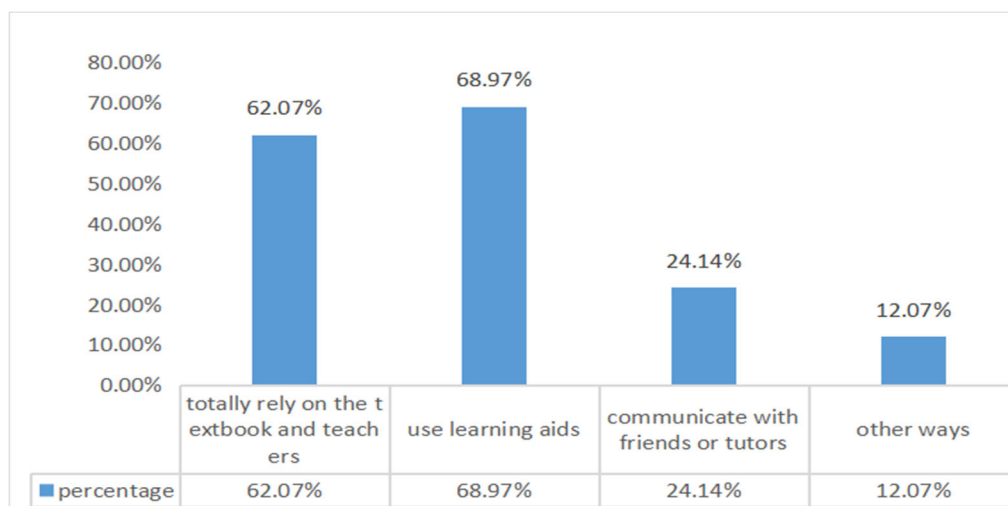**Figure 1.** Student assessment of effective teaching methods

Figure 2. Methods for students to practice English

To explore how to effectively integrate ethical and cultural content into foreign language classrooms, students' preferences towards traditional teaching methods and practicing ways are analyzed. Figure 1 presents the top three effective teaching methods: (1) exercising: students consolidate and apply their knowledge under the guidance of teachers, with a comprehensive score of 4.57; (2) expository method: teachers directly explain verbally, with 4.31; (3) task-driven method: teachers assign an exploratory learning task, then students consult the materials independently and try to solve problems, with 3.19. The ways for students to practice English also shifted from relying entirely on textbooks and classroom lectures (62.07%) to using learning aids tools like dictionaries (68.97%). It suggests that the student-led practicing method might be more efficient for students' learning and can enhance their independent and creative abilities, which should be improved in tertiary education. This research expects that students could utilize learning resources under teachers' guidance and engage in independent learning as well as sharpen their skills according to the actual situation. Next, the main task is to find an appropriate platform for students to access learning resources.

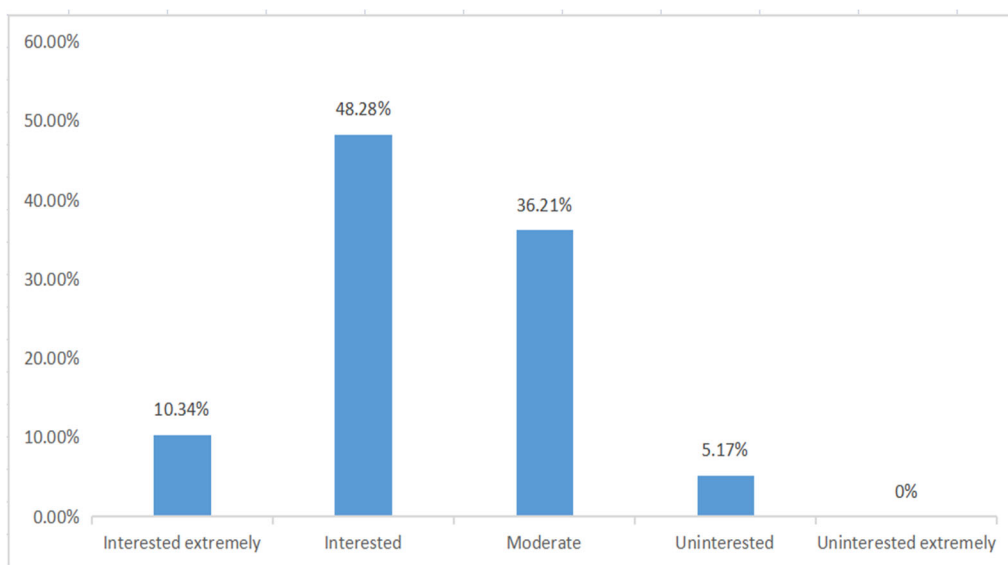## 2.2. The Possibility of Online Teaching Resources as Supplementary Materials

Figure 3. Students' attitude towards online teaching resources
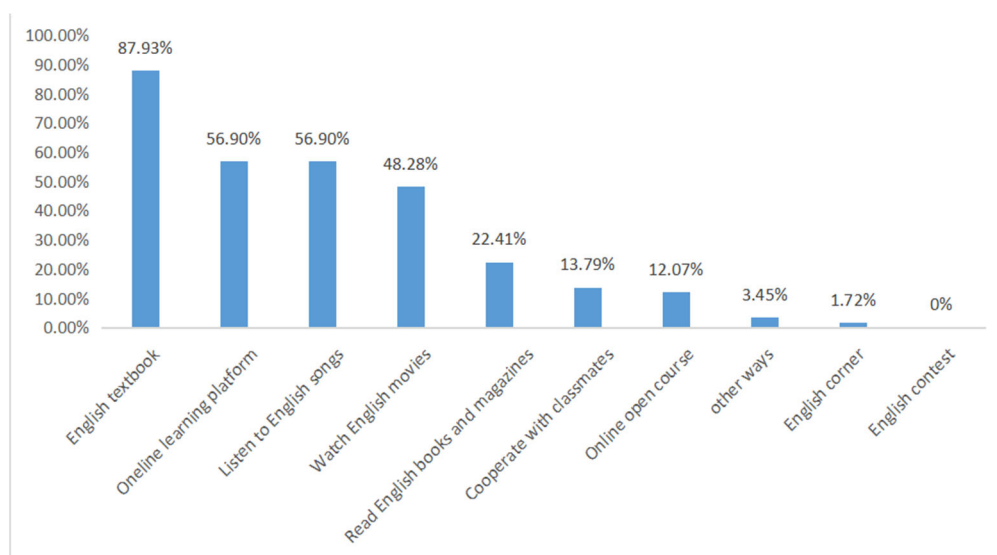

Figure 4. Channels for students to learn English after class

Figure 3 shows that 58.62% of students recognized the importance of online educational resources in foreign language learning; thus students' preference and demand for online teaching resources cannot be ignored in exploring teaching practice. As can be seen from figure 4, online learning platforms are overtaking other traditional extra-curricular learning methods and have become the most significant channel for students to learn outside the classroom in addition to textbooks. Compared to traditional classroom teaching, online teaching has many advantages. Network technology enables a variety of high-quality teaching resources to be shared on network platforms; hence students can choose their learning objectives in accordance with requirements and interests. Meanwhile, network teaching promotes the conversion of the traditional teaching mode centred on teachers' lectures towards a mode focusing on students' independent learning. This transforms a passive learning mode of following the prescribed order into an active mode, allowing students to set up their goals to arrange learning progress depending on different characteristics, which is conducive to cultivating learning independence and innovation ability. Briefly, online teaching not only breaks the time and space constraints of traditional teaching but also improves the utilization rate of educational resources, laying the technological foundation for promoting lifelong education for all and building a learning society [2].

This leads to the initial conclusion that the active use of online teaching resources is an efficient and attractive way to integrate ethical and cultural content into foreign language courses.

3. Feasibility Analysis and Advantages of Online Platform

3.1. Feasibility of Online Teaching

Xi Jinping: The Governance of China has long been used only as a supplement to teaching materials, as teachers only extract a certain part from it to introduce in several classes. It cannot form scientific and long-term systematic teaching with scattered and unsystematic teaching content, so students are unable to grasp the comprehensive ideas and specific content of the book. Although much of it may have been introduced in class, students still hold many questions and do not understand the overall structure and core ideas. What they have learned is incoherent and not yet orderly organized.

In addition to being used as supplementary materials, it is also incorporated into textbooks and introduced into classrooms. In 2022, the "Understanding Contemporary China" series of teaching materials for colleges and universities were officially published, covering multiple foreign languages and international Chinese. In the autumn semester of 2022, the series was promoted and used by undergraduates and postgraduates majoring in foreign languages and literature as well as international students majoring in foreign languages. The English textbook series consists of five volumes, including English Reading and Writing Course, English Speech Course and Chinese-English Translation Course for undergraduates in higher education institutions. The series of textbooks for foreign language and literature majors systematically integrate Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era into the core curriculum like listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, etc. The usage of this series of textbooks has explored an effective approach for ethical and cultural curriculum, but it cannot meet the learning needs of non-foreign language students.

First of all, the whole series is very demanding for teaching conditions. For example, now only foreign language students can access those textbooks, and teaching hours should be increased to achieve a comprehensive and complete result. Compared with foreign language students who have longer classes, the average class lengths of non-foreign language majors cannot meet the class needs. On the one hand, the introduction of "understanding contemporary China" is time-consuming and limited. Besides, those textbooks have a high requirement for students' foreign language level, so it may present a challenge to general majors students to learn and

achieve ideal effects. The series focuses on the core skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, with the aim of training compound international foreign language talents. However, for general students, what they need is to broaden their knowledge of foreign languages and enrich their knowledge base. Meanwhile, the lack of digital resources in the series might make it boring for non-foreign language students to focus only on skills in textbooks.

3.2. Advantages of Online Teaching Platforms

General Secretary Xi Jinping once stressed the need to use new media and technologies to promote a high degree of integration between the traditional strengths of ethical and cultural work and information technology, enhancing modernity and attractiveness. Efforts should be made to cultivate teachers' professional lecturing and researching abilities, design students' immersive learning experience, improve network management mechanisms and other approaches for reshaping the new form of ethical and cultural course education with system integration and chain development through the integrated construction of online course system and teaching platform[3]. There are two main platforms currently used for online teaching: one is professional online teaching softwares, such as Super Star Learning APP and MOOC, which can satisfy the needs of teaching activities such as material sharing, process assessment and learning analysis in the teaching process. Teachers can evaluate students' learning results based on data records such as the time students spend on watching videos and completion of exercises or assignments. However, these softwares have some shortcomings in video broadcasting. The other is video websites and live streaming platforms, such as BiliBili or instant messaging softwares like DingDing and Tencent to develop live streaming and meeting rooms for online teaching. Live video teaching is real-time so teachers can respond quickly to students' requests without interrupting the teaching progress and normal communication with students [2]. Current online teaching resources mainly focus on video networks for completing class lectures, which gives inspiration for combining online platforms teaching with offline teaching to integrate ethical and cultural content into foreign language classes. Considering the problems of class hours and other curriculum settings, micro-lectures videos are chosen to meet the needs of students.

3.3. Introduction of Micro-lectures

Micro-lecture is short for miniature video online class. It takes concise videos as the leading teaching work, focuses on video knowledge points, and promotes students to learn from a single knowledge point to gradually build a complete subject knowledge system. The micro-lecture is developed and designed in combination with the actual teaching situation, using multimedia technology as the support means, taking advantage of rich and diverse network video resources to create personalized and customized teaching courses [4]. As an emerging education model, micro-lectures can achieve the linkage of overall teaching before, during and after class. It is flexible in the form in comparison to those softwares, not only forming a system that can complement teaching content, but also saving teaching resources by not requiring teachers to follow up on all fronts. Micro-lectures are open to all students in need. In addition, it is generally refined within about 10 minutes, discussing a single point, while online teaching softwares usually have several chapters within one course, each of which is divided into lessons, and the length of a video lesson varies from a few minutes to half an hour. Therefore, the micro-lectures are more friendly, enhancing students' learning interest and reducing the low efficiency due to the long course duration.

In terms of learning effects, the micro-lectures should follow production concepts: Firstly, from the perspective of ethical and cultural curriculum, micro-lectures integrate value building, knowledge imparting and ability cultivation [5], helping students understand *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* and internalizing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese

Characteristics for a New Era, externalizing it in practice, strengthening the "Four Confidences ", and further enhancing their political, ideological, theoretical and emotional identity under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Secondly, the micro-lectures follow the fusion of content and foreign language teaching, enabling students to continuously sharpen their foreign language skills in the process by using foreign languages for intellectual inquiries, and deepening their understanding of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

Finally, micro-lectures, attaching importance to ethical and cultural curriculum, can help students analyze Chinese practices from a cross-cultural perspective and enhance their multiple competencies such as language use, cross-cultural competence, critical thinking, and independent learning [5].

4. The Construction and Application of Micro-lectures

4.1. Select Micro-lectures Theme

The theme is the key to the construction and application effectiveness in micro-lectures. Instead of choosing the conventional themes including listening, reading, writing and teaching, the translation strategies in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* are analyzed in depth. For example, the translation strategy of the word "精神", and the theoretical perspective of ecological translation. As China's status gradually increases in the international arena, exchanges and cooperation with other countries are becoming more frequent. English, one of the world's general languages, contains many western characteristics and thinking habits, which are very different from that of Chinese. If one fails to master correct translation strategies and causes any errors, he will not be able to accurately convey China's views and values to the world, and may even make serious misunderstandings or undesirable consequences. Micro-lectures on translation strategies can deepen students' understanding of the discourse system with Chinese characteristics, improve their ability to tell Chinese stories, spread Chinese voices in English, and cultivate more compound talents with excellent skills, cultural confidence and international vision, so as to contribute to China's deep participation in global governance, enhance international communication capacity and build human community with a shared future.

4.2. Make Micro-lectures Videos

Micro-lectures are supposed to be based on students' learning needs and reasonably integrate ethical and cultural elements. Firstly, combine the key and difficult points with the ethical and cultural elements in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*. Taking a micro-lecture on the translation strategy of the word "精神" as an example, this word is commonly used in political texts, rich in connotation and abstract in meaning. To address the weaknesses of students' Chinese-English translation skills, the translation strategy of the word "精神" is combined with the ethical and cultural elements, so that students can deepen their understanding of that word and appreciate the profound Chinese culture while learning the translation method; Secondly, vivid pictures and flash animations are applied to make micro-lectures more attractive. Thirdly, to conform to students' psychology and teaching rules and ensure the integrity of micro-lecture content, the introduction, knowledge points explanation and after-class tests are designed to maximize the learning effect. Fourthly, strictly control the length of the videos within 10 minutes to provide students with efficient and convenient pre-class learning materials and give full play to students' learning autonomy.

4.3. Choose Teaching Platforms

The iSmart platform developed by Higher Education Press fully integrates micro-lectures, MOOC technology, and massive high-quality teaching resources, providing teachers and students with a complete teaching system covering teaching design, classroom interaction, teacher tutoring, student practice, homework feedback and learning assessment [6]. Compared with other online platforms, iSmart is more closely combined with offline classroom teaching, better integrating online and offline teaching. Publishing micro-lectures videos on this platform can not only increase students' learning autonomy but promote teachers' dynamic tracking and understanding of students' learning situations.

4.4. Design Teaching Programmes

According to the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model--a dynamic model of online and blended learning created by Garrison et al, teaching procedures are designed for the foreign language ethical and cultural class based on its "three dimensions" (cognitive presence, social presence, and pedagogical presence) and "four stages" (triggering event, inquiry, integration, and resolution) [7] and organically integrate the micro-lectures into the course teaching. At last questionnaire survey and other methods will be used to examine its effectiveness and feasibility.

4.4.1. Before Class : Independent Learning

Students study the micro-lectures on the iSmart platform on their own to understand the key points and build a preliminary framework. Teachers thus can adopt a task-driven approach by giving difficult questions to students in the introduction part, so that students can learn with clear purposes. Driven by questions, students conduct independent exploration and collaborative learning through the active use of micro-lectures and relevant learning materials. Finally, students are guided to produce learning practice when completing the established tasks.

4.4.2. During the Lesson : Explain the Key Points

Micro-lecture application in the classroom might transform the traditional teacher-student role orientation and classroom teaching situation. From students' passive learning, gradually transformed into students' active inquiry with teachers' assistance and guidance [4]. Discussion teaching methods can be adopted. Based on the problems from micro-lectures before class, students can access relevant information by consulting documents and network search, and then discuss in groups in class or through presentations, debates and speeches, to reach an agreement and solve problems. Discussion teaching method can enhance understanding and communication among students, open up their minds, enable them to consider problems from multiple perspectives and develop their independent thinking skills. Teachers can answer the difficult points arising from students' learning and discussion one by one, and give explanations and extended knowledge for common problems.

4.4.3. After the Lesson : Knowledge Review and Consolidation

After-class revision is the consolidation of classroom learning. The limited class time does not allow all students to fully grasp the learning content because there are differences in students' comprehension and knowledge acceptance levels. Teachers need to arrange follow-up assignments or quizzes on the micro-lectures content after class to help students strengthen understanding, consolidate memory and improve information integration and application ability when testing learning effectiveness.

5. Feedback on the Teaching Effectiveness of Micro-lectures

After teaching, a variety of feedback and evaluation methods are adopted to grasp the learning effectiveness of students in order to make correct evaluations and judgments on the teaching effect. In this way, continuously improve the quality of micro-lecture with ethical and cultural

elements and explore its effective path of construction and application in foreign language courses.

The following methods can be used to study the effectiveness of teaching:

1. Observation: Based on the classroom observation form developed by the evaluation criteria of the National Ministry of Education Innovation Competition, it is necessary to observe the actual operation of the classroom and collect students' viewing data and feedback from the discussion forum on the online platform. According to the observation results, adjust teaching design flexibly, optimise content as well as improve teaching methods in order to achieve better learning results.

2. Exercise testing: Post-lesson quizzes around the micro-lectures content to test the learning effectiveness

3. Questionnaire: Distribute the effect analysis questionnaires after the class. Firstly a small-scale trial test is conducted, optimizing questions according to the feedback by statistical analysis softwares such as SPSS. Distribute them to the whole class finally.

4. Interview: Researchers prepare an interview outline and the order of questions in advance, and then a few students can be selected for guided interviews according to different learning effects (excellent, good, average, poor, very poor), so as to understand the difficulties they encountered in the study, degree of the knowledge mastery, as well as their suggestions for this practice, which can make up for the shortcomings of the direct observation method and help teachers identify potential problems.

6. Conclusion

In order to promote the "Three Enterings" of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and create synergy with the ethical and cultural courses, this study is based on students' learning needs and explores their preference for the integration of ethical and cultural content into foreign language classes, trying to improve their learning performance. The survey results show that students' preference for online teaching resources has enhanced because of spatial and temporal flexibility. At last, the form of micro-lectures is identified as the way to integrate ethical and cultural elements into foreign language teaching, which provides a diverse path to ethical and cultural education and enhances its appeal. As an important part of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and a concentrated representation of Chinese political discourse, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* can provide rich and high-quality materials for ethical and cultural education. Therefore, it's feasible to extract the ethical and cultural elements and combine them with the teaching of translation strategies in order to enhance students' critical thinking and cross-cultural communication skills. In practice, based on various feedback and evaluations, adjust curriculum design flexibly and continue to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of introducing the ethical and cultural elements into the foreign language classroom.

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