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An Empirical Investigation into the Undergraduates' Acceptance of English Courses with Ideological and Political Elements

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Abstract: Since the "ideological and political education (IPE)" was put forward in China, all kinds of courses in colleges and universities across the country have set off a wave of educational reform. The teaching reform of English courses is also in full swing. Scholars and researchers have interpreted the programmatic documents from top to bottom, analyzed the implementation framework of "ideological and political education", excavated the ideological and political elements in English courses, and carried out it in a meaningful way. But education is always the interaction between "teaching" and "learning". Students are the main object of education. Education without evaluating students is meaningless. Based on the perspective of students' subjectivity and guided by Reception Theory, this study carries out a bottom-up research to investigate students' acceptance of IPE, and adopts SPSS analysis based on Likert scale. The paper discusses the factors affecting students' acceptance of English courses with ideological and political elements, in order to provide reference for the implementation of it.

Key words: ideological and political education, the teaching object, Reception Theory, English courses

Introduction

On March 18th, 2019, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed at the symposium for ideological and political teachers: "We should adhere to the unity of explicit education and implicit education, tap the ideological and political education resources contained in other courses and teaching methods, and realize all-round education for all staff." The curriculum moral teaching reform has obviously become the prescribed action of various curriculum teaching reform in colleges and universities in China. Under the new situation, it further emphasized the need to integrate the ideological and political education in the whole process of classroom teaching, so as to achieve the main purpose of the whole process of education. English curriculum, as a humanity, is an important carrier of ideological and political education. But education is always the interaction between "teaching" and "learning". We should not only be aware of how the teachers react to that policy, but also pay equal attention to that of the students. Therefore, it is necessary and significant to explore the extent of undergraduates' acceptance of English courses with ideological and political elements.

Reception Theory, which originated from Reception Aesthetics put forward by Jauss and Iser in the 1960s, emphasizes the shift from "author center", "text center" to "reader center". In the 1990s, Liu Xianyi introduced Reception Theory into the field of education in China and put forward the main research object of educational reception theory. Subsequently, Liu Jianjun, Wang Yanying and other scholars continued to deepen the theory and expanded it to the ideological and political education to emphasize the subject status of the recipient in ideological and political education and explore the ways to improve the reception effect of ideological and political education. Based on the Reception Theory, the willing of the undergraduates to accept the ideological education is affected by five aspects: the receiving subject, the receiving object, the receiving media, the receiving environment and the transmitter. Is there any uniqueness in the acceptance of English courses for ideological and political education? That is what this research will tend to illustrate.

Literature review

The English courses with ideological and political elements, which is an important part of college education, has become an important research topic for many scholars and teachers. In 2014, the scholars in Shanghai International Studies University took the lead in putting forward "building an ideological and political education system with the characteristics of foreign language colleges and universities, emphasizing that ideological and political education and foreign language teaching are equally important in the cultivation of foreign language talents in the new era, and the two should be unified with each other" (Jiang Feng, 2014). In 2020, the Ministry of Education in China issued Notification on the outline of ideological and political construction of courses in colleges and universities. Since then, the research on ideological and political education has set off an upsurge in China. Some researchers, including Zhang Jingyuan (2020), Liu Jianjun (2020), Liu Zhengguang (2021), Zhong Lingli (2021), have interpreted the background and connotation of the ideological and political concept of foreign language curriculum from top to bottom. While some researchers, such as Wen Qiufang (2021), Huang Guowen (2021), Xiao Qiong (2021), focused on constructing the connotation and implementation framework of foreign language curriculum ideological and political construction and put forward the elements of different dimensions of foreign language curriculum ideological and political construction. They put forward some practical models and frameworks for implementing curriculum ideological and political teaching reform. Yang Hua (2021), Zheng Yanlin (2021), Ren Zengqiang (2021), Yin Jing (2021), Yang Zhengjun (2021), Li Yongzhong (2021) focused on the implementation of curriculum ideological and political ideas in specific foreign language courses. In addition, Huang Guowen (2020) and Xu Jinfen (2021) paid attention to the construction of foreign language teaching textbooks and the ideological and political content construction of College English teaching materials in order to aid the curriculum ideological and political teaching reform.

In a word, the existing researches are basically top-down researches, no matter it is on policy interpretation, teaching implementation, or the development of research framework. Few studies pay attention to the teaching object, that is, the students' understanding and acceptance of courses for ideological and political education. This study overcomes the above limitations, adopts the bottom-up survey method, follows the principle of problem orientation, and uses the form of questionnaire and interview to investigate the students' understanding and acceptance of English courses with ideological and political elements.

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Research design

This section introduces the overall design of the research, including the questions to be answered, the participants, the research instruments and the methods employed for data analysis.

Research questions

Against the background and literature reviewed above, the present study aims to answer the following three questions.

1) What is the present situation of undergraduates' preference of English courses for ideological and political education?
2) What are the main factors that affect the implementation and promotion of college students' acceptance of English courses with ideological and political elements?
3) What should be done to improve the students' willingness to accept English courses with ideological and political elements?

Participants & Data collection

The survey object of this study is the students who accept English courses teaching in colleges and universities, including English majors and non-English majors. The research attempts to cover the college and university students from at least one-third provinces in China. The questionnaire is designed on the basis of the Reception Theory. Then a series of survey is conducted, including initial survey, pre survey, reliability analysis and item analysis of the results, to form the final formal questionnaire, including students' basic information (school, grade, gender, etc.), and 12 items in Likert-scale, by deleting and eliminating the items with vague semantics and overlapping concepts. The "questionnaire star" is used to issue the questionnaire. The students scan the code on their mobile phone to answer the questionnaire and submit it. The integrity and consistency of the returned questionnaire are checked. After excluding the invalid questionnaire, a total of 993 valid questionnaires are obtained.

Variables

Combined with the Reception Theory and the views of the scholars and experts mentioned above, this paper summarizes the influencing factors of whether college students accept English courses with ideological and political elements into four main dimensions: self cognition, the necessity of implementing the "ideological and political education" (IPE) of English courses, the role of IPE, teachers' teaching methods and implementation effects. These four dimensions are used as independent variables. Students' willingness to accept English courses with ideological and political elements is taken as the dependent variable.

Data analysis

Whether college students accept English courses with ideological and political elements and how to accept it are affected by many factors. The influencing factors are not isolated, but interactive. The study of a single factor cannot fully explain this phenomenon. Therefore, quantitative method was applied in the research and a Likert-scale questionnaire was used to collect data. Descriptive statistics and qualitative data were derived from the participants' answers to the Likert-scale items in the questionnaire, which was analyzed by SPSS 26.0.

Results

The quantitative and qualitative data collected from the questionnaire are presented in this section below. Note that they were collected and analyzed in Chinese and then translated into English. The translation was checked by the two researchers.

The descriptive statistics of respondents indicated that males accounted for 26.5% of total response while females represented 73.5%. It was also found that 23.7% of the participants was freshmen, 47% sophomores, 24.4% juniors, and 4.9% seniors.

Following the descriptive statistics of participants was to make sure the normality of data by SPSS. Reliability analysis was conducted to verify the rationality and reliability of the data collected from the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha. Table 1 shows that Cronbach's alpha is 0.917, that is to say, the result has an acceptable reliability, because Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). Additionally, validity analysis was conducted by KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) and Bartlett's Test. Table 2 shows that Bartlett's test is significant (P=0.000) and KMO=0.916. Hence, the validity is supported.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.917	12

Table 2

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.916
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	9499.878
	df	66
	Sig.	0.000

Another test called exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was carried out in order to show more clearly the factors affecting college students' acceptance of English courses with ideological and political elements. The initial factors were solved by principal component analysis, and the number of common factors were determined

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by calculating the eigenvalues and variance contribution rate of all initial factors. However, many factors were related to the variables, which was not a significant explanation, based on the analysis of the initial factors. Therefore, the orthogonal rotation method with the largest variance is used to rotate the factors and redistribute the variance proportion explained by each factor, making the significance of the factors easier to explain.

Table 3

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.601	55.007	55.007	5.437	45.309	45.309
2	2.139	17.825	72.832	3.303	27.523	72.832

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Table 3 shows that EFA identified two correlated factors, which together explained 72.832% of the students' acceptance of ideological education. The variance contribution rate of the first factor to the original variable is 45.309%, and the variance contribution rate of the second factor to the original variable is 27.523%.

Table 4

Rotated Component Matrix

	Component	1	2
Q10	IPE can enhance cultural self-confidence.	0.870	
Q11	The course assessment includes the changes of thoughts, attitudes and daily behavior habits.	0.836	
Q12	There are diverse ways to evaluate the IPE courses.	0.833	
Q9	IPE is helpful to improve learning interest.	0.828	
Q7	My teacher carry out certain IPE-related activities in classroom.	0.817	
Q6	I am willing to accept IPE.	0.807	
Q8	My teacher organizes teaching by situational teaching and teacher-student interaction.	0.761	
Q5	Undergraduates must have deep patriotism and good ideological and political quality.	0.739	
Q2	I know the new concept of IPE.		0.906
Q3	I can tell exactly the definition of IPE.		0.896
Q4	I can distinguish the two concepts of "Ideological and Political Education" and "Ideological and Political Course".		0.839
Q1	I just heard of IPE.		0.772

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations

Table 4 shows that the first common factor is characterized by the implementation and important role of IPE, and the second common factor summarizes the college students' understanding of IPE.

Multiple linear regression was used to analyze the relationship between the two common factors and their respective variables so as to fully illustrate their relation.

Figure 1

Multiple Linear Regression: Standardized Predicted Value and Residual (factor 1)

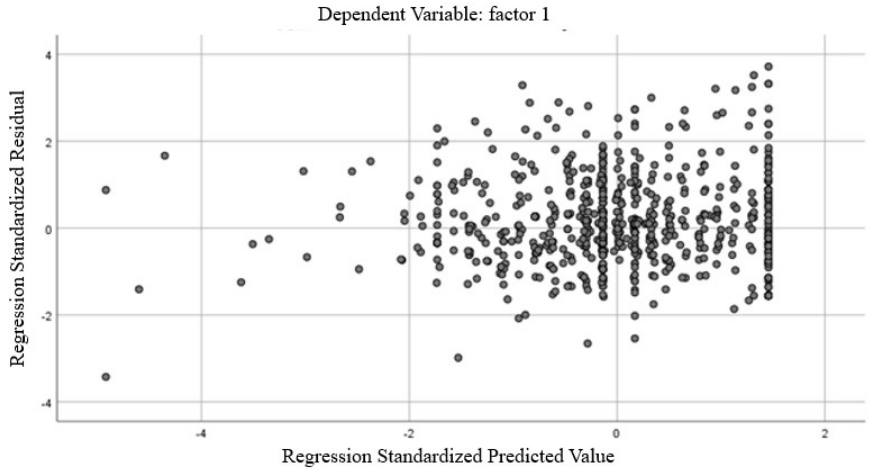


Table 5

Descriptives Correlation Coefficients of Variables (n=993) (factor 1)

Variables		Descriptives		Correlation Coefficients							
		M	SD	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q9	Q7	Q6	Q8	Q5
DV	Factor 1	0	1	0.87*	0.836*	0.833*	0.828*	0.817*	0.807*	0.761*	0.739*
IV	Q10	4.09	0.736	—	0.747*	0.756*	0.803*	0.668*	0.685*	0.625*	0.587*
	Q11	4.01	0.736		—	0.815*	0.744*	0.688*	0.641*	0.691*	0.508*
	Q12	3.98	0.775			—	0.762*	0.688*	0.642*	0.671*	0.495*
	Q9	3.96	0.789				—	0.668*	0.661*	0.637*	0.483*
	Q7	4.05	0.762					—	0.672*	0.728*	0.560*
	Q6	4.08	0.751						—	0.560*	0.673*
	Q8	4.01	0.777							—	0.474*
	Q5	4.31	0.739								—

**p<0.05*

Table 6

Multiple Linear Regression: Important Statistics (n=993) (factor 1)

Variables		*R*	R^2	Adjusted R^2	*F* (8, 984)	Beta	*t* (985)	Tolerance	VIF
DV	Factor1	0.974	0.949	0.948	2282.126*				
IV	Q10					0.213	15.063	0.261	3.833
	Q11					0.129	9.192	0.264	3.792
	Q12					0.120	8.457	0.258	3.869
	Q9					0.123	8.977	0.275	3.641
	Q7					0.141	11.279	0.335	2.989
	Q6					0.117	9.674	0.358	2.790
	Q8					0.107	9.288	0.390	2.563
	Q5					0.221	21.687	0.498	2.007

**p<0.05*

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Multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the best linear combination of the above 8 questions for predicting the importance and implement of English courses for ideological and political education. Statistical assumptions, such as the normal distribution of residuals and the non-linear correlation between predicted variables and residuals were all met in the analysis (Figure 1). The means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients could be found in Table 5. The regression method showed that the combination of the 8 questions significantly predicted students' attitude toward IPE (Table 6). The beta weights, presented in Table 6, suggested that Q5 contributes most to predicting students' attitude toward IPE.

Figure 2

Multiple Linear Regression: Standardized Predicted Value and Residual (factor 2)

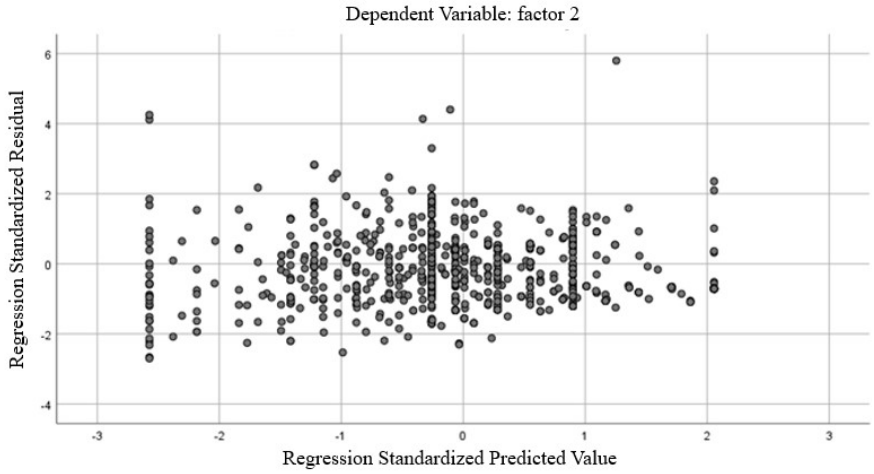


Table 7

Descriptives Correlation Coefficients of Variables (n=993) (factor 2)

Variables		Descriptives		Correlation Coefficients			
		M	SD	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
DV	Factor 2	0	1	0.906*	0.896*	0.839*	0.772*
IV	Q2	3.29	0.954	—	0.795*	0.702*	0.738*
	Q3	3.04	0.978		—	0.738*	0.616*
	Q4	3.17	1.017			—	0.565*
	Q1	3.52	0.947				—

*$p<0.05$

Table 8

Multiple Linear Regression: Important Statistics (n=993) (factor 2)

Variables		R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F (4,988)	Beta	t (985)	Tolerance	VIF
DV	Factor 2	0.975	0.951	0.951	4827.783*				
IV	Q2					0.321	23.222	0.257	3.889
	Q3					0.334	26.256	0.304	3.289
	Q4					0.265	24.395	0.417	2.397
	Q1					0.179	17.164	0.451	2.219

*$p<0.05$

Table 7 and Table 8 showed that the combination of the 4 questions significantly predicted students' attitude toward IPE. The beta weights, presented in Table 8 suggested that Q3 contributes most to predicting students' attitude toward IPE.

The above analyses show that students believe that in addition to a solid foreign language foundation, they must also have deep patriotism, good ideological and political literacy, firm self-confidence and recognition of Chinese culture, and have a conscious awareness of spreading excellent Chinese culture. The more IPE can achieve this goal, the higher the extent is of students' recognition and harvest of such courses. And the more students understand IPE, the more they can accept it in the process of teaching and learning.

Finally, one-way ANOVA was conducted to check whether the students in different grade would accept IPE equally. Take Q6 (I am willing to accept English courses for ideological and political education.) in the student questionnaire as the dependent variable and "students' grades (freshman, sophomore and junior)" as the independent variable. Considering that senior students are graduating classes and the curriculum arrangement is different from that of other grades, they are excluded.

Table 9

Comparison of Acceptance in Different Grades

	Freshman (n=235)		Sophomore (n=467)		Junior (n=242)		F (3,941)	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Acceptance	4.05	0.75	4.11	0.74	3.99	0.78	2.224	0.109

*$p<0.05$

Table 9 shows that the acceptance degree was not significantly varied in different grades ($p>0.05$). Freshman, sophomore and junior could accept almost equally the English courses with ideological and political elements.

Discussion

Based on the results, this section responds to the three research questions, including the overall situation of the students' preference to IPE, the factors affecting their acceptance, and the measurements to be taken to improve it.

Since IPE was put forward, it has been carried out all over China. By now, scholars generally believe that it has achieved good results. The data shows that no matter freshmen, sophomores, juniors or seniors accept this notion equally, but most of them have limited cognition and understanding of IPE, which is limited to the medium level. Take the item No.1 (I just heard of IPE.) and No.2 (I know the new concept of IPE.) for example, most participants choose 5 (agree strongly), while as for item No.3 (I can tell exactly the definition of IPE.) and No.4 (I can distinguish the two concepts of "Ideological and Political Education" and "Ideological and Political Course".), more than half of them choose 2(disagree) and 3(not sure). That

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shows students just know a little about the connotation and there is still much room for improvement in the implementation and promotion of IPE.

There are two key factors affecting students' acceptance of IPE. The first one is the students' realization of the implementation and importance of IPE, that is, the methods teachers adopted to integrate ideological and political elements into classroom teaching, curriculum assessment and teaching effects. This means by the pre-designed classroom activities not only can students master key foreign language points, but also improve their patriotism, ideological and political literacy, cultural self-confidence and the sense of self-consciousness of spreading Chinese culture. The second factor is students' cognition of IPE. They couldn't just know the concept of IPE, but also its connotation.

To improve students' acceptance of English courses with ideological and political elements, firstly, the teaching content should be innovated. The teaching content has a positive impact on students' learning preference. The richer the content is, the more willing students are to accept it. Therefore, new teaching materials with ideological and political ideas should be put into use. The ideological and political elements of the teaching content should be integrated into the classroom teaching. Those elements should be fully combined with the current politics and the examples must be closely related to life, so as to make the knowledge vivid and easy to understand.

Secondly, the teaching methods should be changed. Teaching mode is supposed to be transformed from the traditional "teacher-centered" to "students-centered", such as by flipped classroom, situational teaching and group discussion. Teachers must excavate rich ideological and political materials, and combine it with English language knowledge, so as to cultivate students' values in an active learning atmosphere. At the same time, course evaluation should be based on the perspective of ideology and politics to guide students to self-examine from different angles.

Thirdly, the role of guidance should be enhanced. Teachers, whether in words and deeds, knowledge reserves or sense of responsibility, always have a profound impact on students, and then affect their attitude towards the course. In the classroom teaching, teachers should correctly guide students in patriotism, world outlook and outlook on life. What the students gain is not only the improvement of their English, but also the formation of their ideological awareness, a sound personality, a beautiful mind and civilized behavior.

Conclusion

This study has conducted a bottom-up survey from the perspective of the receiver of IPE, the English learners, to clarify the main factors affecting undergraduates' acceptance of IPE of English courses by using SPSS statistical analysis. The results suggest that there is a great tendency of undergraduates to accept IPE, but they really have certain difficulties to deeply understand it and put it into practice. More measurements need to be taken to help them to better comprehend it and fully carry it out. The present paper does not intend to imply that only English learners have such difficulties. This is only an attempt to do the research from bottom to up. Besides, this research is limited in collecting students' viewpoint by Liker-scale, while future study could conduct in-dept interviews or something like that, and in that way, the conclusion will be

scrutinized in a more comprehensive sense.

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