

From Eloquence to Ethos: Integrating Ideological and Political Education into the Public Speaking Curriculum in Chinese Colleges

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Abstract

This study develops a comprehensive framework for integrating Ideological and Political Education (IPE) into the Public Speaking course in Chinese colleges. Drawing on both Chinese “Curricular Synergy” and Western theories of rhetorical ethics, constructivism, and critical pedagogy, it proposes a three-dimensional model encompassing curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher development. The findings highlight that value cultivation and communicative competence reinforce each other through reflective practice, offering an actionable pathway for holistic education reform.

Keywords

Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education (IPE), Public Speaking and Eloquence, Holistic Education, Pedagogical Integration, Curriculum Design

1. Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of Chinese higher education, the fundamental mission of “fostering virtue and cultivating talents” has been established as the overarching goal, guiding a shift from a singular focus on knowledge transmission towards a more holistic education that shapes students’ character, values, and social responsibility (Xi, 2018). Within this context, Ideological and Political Education (IPE) has evolved from a standalone subject to a pivotal component that must permeate the entire curriculum—a concept widely known as “curriculum-based IPE” (Xin et al., 2024). This integration is deemed crucial for developing a new generation equipped to contribute to national advancement.

The “Public Speaking and Eloquence” course, given its inherently practical and

communicative nature, presents a unique and potent platform for this integration. Unlike many theoretical courses, it engages students directly in formulating, articulating, and defending ideas, thereby offering a natural conduit for exploring and internalizing values (Lucas, 2020). The very act of persuasive speaking is intertwined with ethos and credibility, which are fundamentally linked to the speaker's values and social responsibility (Kennedy, 1991). When strategically designed, this course can simultaneously enhance students' communicative competence and self-confidence while subtly and effectively reinforcing the ideological and moral principles central to their development as well-rounded individuals (Ling, 2023).

However, the current practice of integrating IPE into the Public Speaking curriculum in many Chinese colleges remains suboptimal and often faces significant challenges. Scholars note that a common issue is the superficial or forced inclusion of political content, which feels disconnected from the core communicative skills being taught, leading to a phenomenon often described as a disconnection from the curriculum's inherent aesthetic and functional value (Zhang, 2025). Other challenges include a lack of systematic teacher training in effectively merging pedagogical goals with ideological ones (Wilder, 2012) and an assessment system that predominantly focuses on technical skills, often overlooking the development and evaluation of students' ideological awareness (Yue et al., 2023). This gap undermines the course's educational potential and represents a missed opportunity in nurturing socially responsible citizens.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by systematically exploring and proposing concrete pathways for the deep and organic integration of IPE into the Public Speaking and Eloquence course. It seeks to move beyond theoretical discussion to provide actionable strategies for curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and teacher development, drawing on both the specific requirements of the Chinese educational context and general principles of value-based education (Padmakumari et al., 2025). The central research question is: How can Ideological and Political Education be effectively and seamlessly integrated into the content, pedagogy, and assessment of the Public Speaking and Eloquence course to enhance both students' communicative skills and their ideological and moral literacy?

This study contributes both theoretically, by articulating a coherent integration model grounded in cross-cultural educational theory, and practically, by offering implementable strategies for skill-based courses. Through theoretical analysis and practical exploration, this paper will develop a structured framework for this integration. The findings are intended to offer valuable theoretical support and practical guidance for educators and curriculum designers in the context of Chinese colleges, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of holistic student development within the framework of China's higher education objectives.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a synthesis of educational theories that collectively justify and guide the integration of Ideological and Political Education (IPE) into a

skills-oriented curriculum. Drawing from both Chinese and Western intellectual traditions, the framework combines the philosophy of *Curricular Synergy* with rhetorical ethics, constructivism, and critical pedagogy, forming a coherent foundation for the proposed pedagogical model.

2.1. The Chinese Concept of Curricular Synergy

“Curricular Synergy,” or *Courses Ideology and Politics*, represents more than the addition of political content to courses; it embodies an educational philosophy asserting that all disciplines share the responsibility of fostering virtue and cultivating talent (Chen, 2023). It moves IPE from the periphery of political education to the core of the curriculum, emphasizing the inseparability of knowledge acquisition and value formation. As Dose (2021) notes, true education unites “knowing” and “doing,” “skills” and “ethics.” The *Public Speaking and Eloquence* course—by engaging students in the formulation and defense of ideas—naturally serves as a channel through which ethical reflection and ideological growth can occur through communicative practice.

2.2. The Ethics of Rhetoric: A Classical Foundation

The intrinsic link between communication and morality provides a classical Western justification for this integration. Aristotle’s concept of *ethos*—the persuasive appeal of the speaker’s character—establishes that credibility arises not merely from technique but from virtue and goodwill (Kennedy, 1991). Thus, the cultivation of persuasive skill inherently involves moral formation. Teaching public speaking, when explicitly connected to civic and moral responsibility, can transform rhetorical training into an ethical enterprise that aligns *ethos* with socialist core values and social responsibility (Lucas, 2020). While rhetorical ethics provides the moral foundation, constructivism explains the learning process through which such values are internalized.

2.3. Constructivism and Experiential Learning

Constructivist and experiential learning theories complement rhetorical ethics by emphasizing that values cannot simply be transmitted—they must be constructed through experience and reflection. Kolb (1984) and Dewey (1986) argue that knowledge gains meaning when grounded in lived experience. Applied to the *Public Speaking* course, this approach invites students to embody values such as responsibility and empathy by preparing speeches on community issues, engaging in debates on ethical dilemmas, and reflecting on their rhetorical choices. Such experiences foster deeper moral awareness and help transform ideological principles into personal convictions (Padmakumari et al., 2025). Building upon this experiential dimension, critical pedagogy further extends the framework toward empowerment and social transformation.

2.4. Critical Pedagogy and Empowerment

Freire’s (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emphasizes that education should be a

practice of freedom rather than indoctrination. Within this view, public speaking becomes a platform for critical inquiry and civic engagement rather than mere performance. Students learn to use their voices to question injustice, articulate social visions, and engage in reasoned dialogue. This transformation aligns closely with the IPE mission of nurturing citizens who are ethically grounded and socially responsible (Yue et al., 2023). In this sense, critical pedagogy elevates public speaking from a technical exercise to a moral and civic endeavor.

Recent studies in value-infused communication pedagogy further support this integrative approach. Bell & Jackson (2021) proposed a public speaking model that embeds social issues into speech assignments to foster ethical reasoning. Similarly, Yuan et al. (2022) empirically demonstrated that reflective speech tasks significantly enhance students' moral judgment and civic engagement. These studies reinforce the relevance and timeliness of integrating ideological and moral dimensions into communicative skill development.

2.5. Synthesis: Toward an Integrated Model

The theories discussed above form an interconnected ecosystem rather than isolated rationales. *Curricular Synergy* establishes the why—the moral and institutional imperative for integrating values into every course. *Rhetorical Ethics* provides the what—a natural entry point for content integration through the concept of *ethos*. *Constructivism* and *Experiential Learning* explain the how—the pedagogical processes by which values are experienced, reflected upon, and internalized. Finally, *Critical Pedagogy* defines the so what—the transformative aim of empowering students as ethically conscious communicators and active citizens.

Together, these perspectives create a dynamic and coherent theoretical foundation for the integration model proposed in this study. They justify IPE not as an external imposition but as an organic extension of rhetorical education—one that unites technical competence with moral consciousness, and personal eloquence with collective responsibility.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the design-based conceptual framework rather than an empirical experiment, serving as a practical guide for implementation. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, this study proposes a tripartite implementation framework. The design of this framework is directly informed by the core challenges identified in the introduction: the disconnection of content, the lack of reflective pedagogy, and the insufficient teacher readiness. To address these specific shortcomings systematically, our methodology is formulated as three interconnected pillars: Curricular Content, Pedagogical Practice, and Teacher Development. This structure ensures a comprehensive approach that moves beyond superficial course adjustments to foster a deep, organic, and sustainable integration of IPE.

The process commences with a strategic redesign of the core curriculum, moving beyond abstract themes to concrete, thematically-driven speech assignments.

For example, a standard “Informative Speech” assignment can be transformed into a “Speech on Cultural Heritage,” where students research and present on a specific intangible cultural heritage, thereby linking research and presentation skills to the goal of fostering cultural confidence. Similarly, a commonplace “Persuasive Speech” can be reframed as a “Policy Advocacy Speech on a Local Community Issue.” Here, a student might argue for the installation of more accessible facilities, requiring them to employ persuasive techniques while simultaneously engaging with concepts of social equity and civic responsibility. This method ensures that ideological and moral development is not a separate lecture but is embedded within the tasks students complete to hone their speaking skills.

With the curriculum in place, the classroom must become a dynamic space for experiential learning and critical reflection. The instructor’s role shifts from a mere corrector of posture and pronunciation to a facilitator of meaningful discourse. After delivering a speech, rather than only receiving feedback on their eye contact, a student would participate in a guided reflective discussion. The instructor might pose questions such as, “How did your research on this community issue change your perspective on a citizen’s role?” or “In advocating for your position, which values were you appealing to?” This practice deepens learning by forcing students to articulate the connection between their oratory and their evolving values.

The model’s efficacy depends critically on faculty readiness. Therefore, a crucial component is targeted professional development. This includes practical, interdisciplinary training sessions co-facilitated by communication specialists and ideological education experts. For instance, a workshop could involve instructors workshopping a sample student speech, analyzing not only its structure and delivery but also brainstorming how to guide a classroom discussion on the values implicit in its message. Additionally, creating a shared resource repository of vetted case studies, reflective prompts, and integrated assessment rubrics can provide invaluable practical support, ensuring consistency and quality across different classrooms. No human participants were directly involved at this stage; ethical approval will be sought for future pilot studies.

The overall conceptual framework guiding this integration is illustrated in **Figure 1**. It illustrates a streamlined logic model where foundational theories inform core integration strategies, which are then executed through three primary pathways to achieve the ultimate educational goals.

The application of the “Pedagogical Practice” pillar follows an iterative cycle of experiential learning and reflection, depicted in **Figure 2**.

4. Implementation

The transition from a theoretical framework to tangible educational outcomes requires a meticulously planned. Moving beyond a simple rollout, we propose a Four-Phase Implementation Model that embeds principles of collaborative design, iterative research, and community building to ensure sustainability and continuous improvement. The phased approach ensures scalability while allowing continuous reflective refinement.

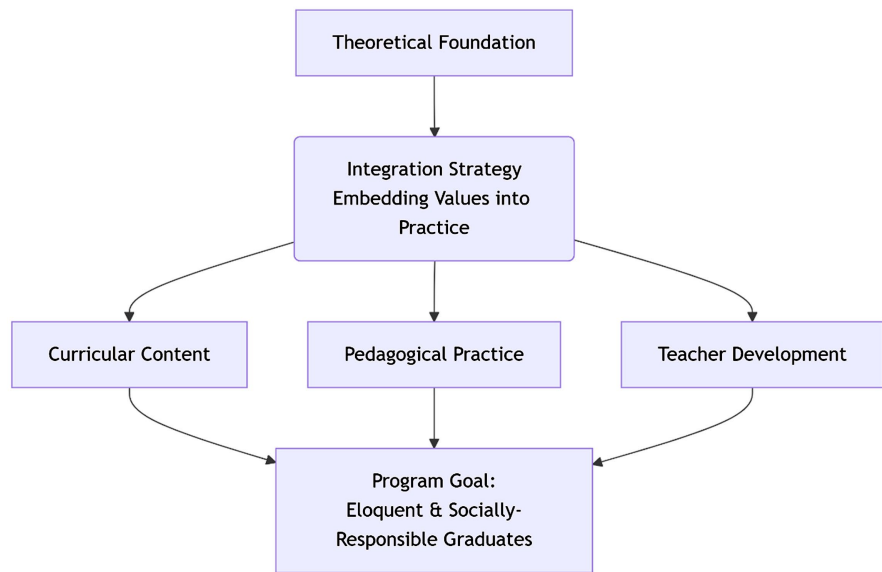


Figure 1. The theoretical model for integrating Ideological and Political Education (IPE) into the Public Speaking and Eloquence course.

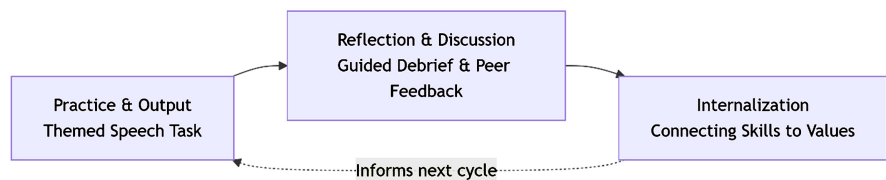


Figure 2. The experiential learning and reflection cycle for classroom implementation.

4.1. Phase 1: Preparation and Co-Design (Months 1 - 2)

This foundational phase is characterized by interdisciplinary knowledge integration. A working group, comprising public speaking instructors, ideological education specialists, and educational technologists, will be established. Their primary task is to co-design the “Integrated Teaching Toolkit,” a process that synthesizes distinct domains of expertise to create pedagogically sound and ideologically coherent materials. The toolkit includes:

- 1) Thematically-Driven Assignment Packs: Ready-to-use modules for each speech type (e.g., the “Cultural Confidence” informative speech pack).
- 2) Structured Reflection Templates: Standardized, yet adaptable, worksheets and online journal prompts for students.
- 3) The Integrated Assessment Rubric: The finalized rubric combining technical and ethical criteria.

This co-design process ensures that the integration is grounded in a fusion of expert knowledge from its inception.

4.2. Phase 2: Pilot Implementation and Iterative Refinement (Months 3 - 6)

This stage operates as a practitioner-driven design-based research cycle. In this

pilot phase, the toolkit will be implemented in six classes involving approximately 240 students (estimated at 40 students per class). This scale ensures sufficient data diversity and supports the generalizability of findings in subsequent empirical validation. This pilot phase is not merely a test but a formal iterative feedback loop where instructors act as co-researchers. Data is collected through:

- 1) Weekly instructor logbooks documenting classroom dynamics and student responses.
- 2) Mid-pilot focused group discussions with a sample of pilot students.
- 3) Analysis of student reflection journals (anonymized for ethics).

The working group meets bi-weekly to analyze this empirical feedback, using it to refine and validate the toolkit in real-time, enhancing its robustness and practicality before full-scale deployment.

4.3. Phase 3: Full-Scale Rollout with Sustained Support (Months 7 - 12)

Following refinement, the model is implemented across all Public Speaking courses. Crucially, this phase focuses on building capacity through the establishment of a “Community of Practice” (CoP). This CoP, meeting monthly, is more than a support network; it is a professional learning community that fosters collaborative inquiry and shared praxis. It provides a structured platform for instructors to reflect on their practice, troubleshoot challenges, and collectively develop solutions, thereby reinforcing their roles as reflective practitioners. Simultaneously, the online resource repository is launched, serving as a dynamic, community-owned repository for shared materials.

4.4. Phase 4: Long-Term System Integration (Ongoing)

The final phase focuses on achieving institutionalization and long-term sustainability. The model is formally integrated into the college’s academic structures and policies, a critical step for ensuring the innovation outlives its initial proponents. This involves:

- 1) Mandatory orientation for new faculty members teaching the course.
- 2) Formal inclusion of the “Integrated Teaching Toolkit” in the official course documentation and quality assurance protocols.

This phase represents the transition from a successful project to a systemic and sustained component of the institutional educational philosophy, embedding the changes into the fabric of the college.

5. Evaluation: A Multi-Dimensional and Data-Driven Framework

In this study, “ideological awareness” refers to students’ understanding and identification with national core values, social responsibility, and civic morality. “Value cultivation” denotes the process through which students internalize ideological principles as personal convictions and behavioral guides via curricular activities

and reflective practice. These constructs are operationalized in the integrated assessment rubric under the dimensions of “Ethical Reasoning & Social Awareness” and “Value Internalization & Civic Identity.”

5.1. Figures and Tables Formative Assessment: Tracking the Process

Formative assessment focuses on monitoring the implementation process and providing ongoing feedback for improvement.

1) Instructor Feedback

Data from the weekly logbooks and CoP meetings is systematically analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify recurring themes related to implementation barriers, successes, and shifts in pedagogical understanding.

2) Student Mid-Course Feedback

Anonymous surveys are administered at the mid-term point, specifically asking about the perceived relevance and meaningfulness of the IPE integration. Likert-scale and open-ended questions will be used, allowing for both quantitative trending and qualitative insights to guide mid-course adjustments.

5.2. Summative Assessment: Measuring the Outcomes

Summative assessment rigorously evaluates the final outcomes against the course’s dual objectives.

1) Quantitative Analysis of Speech Performance

Student scores from the expanded assessment rubric will be analyzed quantitatively. The evaluation plan proposes to employ inter-rater reliability testing (e.g., Cohen’s Kappa) and correlation analysis (Spearman’s rank) to verify the hypothesized synergy between skill and value dimensions. A Spearman’s rank correlation analysis will be conducted to examine the relationship between scores in the “Technical Delivery” and “Ethical Reasoning & Social Awareness” categories. Spearman’s correlation is appropriate for ordinal data such as rubric scores and does not assume normal distribution. The significance threshold is set at $p < 0.05$. A statistically significant positive correlation would provide robust quantitative evidence for the proposed synergy between skill acquisition and value cultivation.

2) Qualitative Thematic Analysis of Reflective Journals

A representative sample of reflective journals will be analyzed using systematic thematic analysis, following the established procedure by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involves (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, and (5) defining and naming themes. The use of software such as NVivo will aid in managing and coding the data systematically. This method moves beyond simple feedback, providing deep, qualitative evidence of students’ value internalization, critical thinking, and evolving civic identity.

3) Longitudinal Tracking of Alumni

A key innovative component is the commitment to a mixed-methods longitu-

dinal study. Graduates will be surveyed annually for at least three years to track self-reported changes in communicative confidence, civic engagement, and ethical decision-making. To mitigate sample attrition, strategies such as maintaining regular communication, offering small incentives, and utilizing multiple contact channels will be employed. Crucially, this quantitative tracking will be supplemented with semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of alumni. These interviews will yield rich, narrative data on the lasting impact and personal meaning of the integrated course experience, capturing outcomes that surveys alone cannot.

This multi-dimensional data collection and analysis plan is visualized in **Figure 3**.

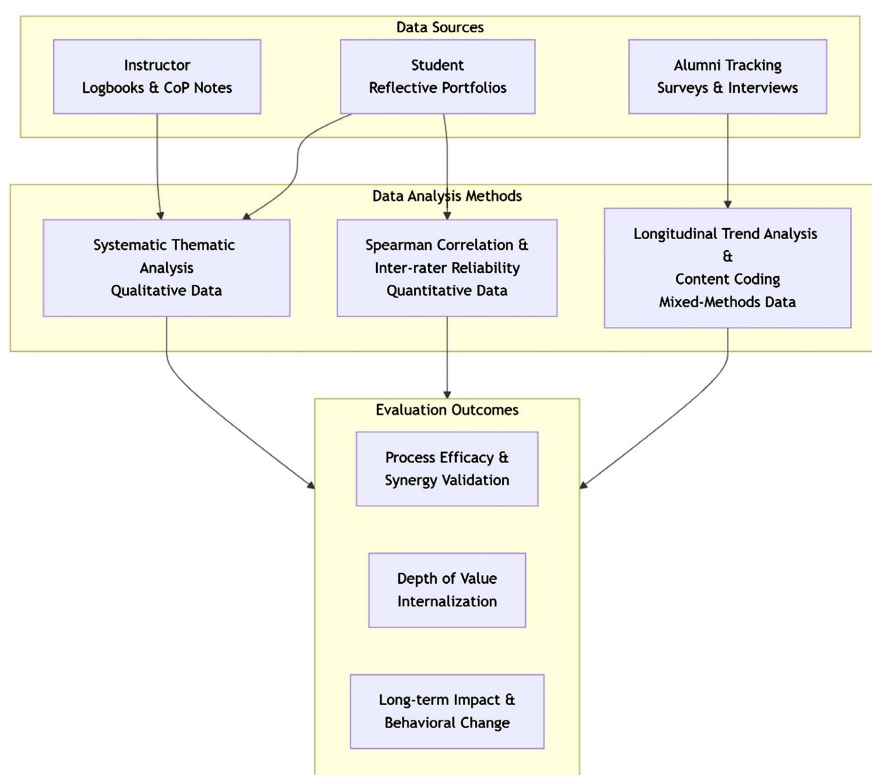


Figure 3. The multi-dimensional evaluation framework for the integrated course.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Discussion

The implementation of the proposed model demonstrates that integrating Ideological and Political Education (IPE) into the *Public Speaking and Eloquence* course transcends the traditional additive approach. Rather than diluting the course's communicative focus, value-based integration enhances both skill development and ethical awareness. Anchoring speech tasks in substantive topics—such as cultural heritage and civic responsibility—provides students with a meaningful *purpose* for communication. This sense of purpose strengthens rhetorical authenticity and aligns with the classical principle that persuasive appeal (*ethos*) is rooted in character and moral integrity (Kennedy, 1991). Preliminary observations suggest that

technical proficiency and ethical reasoning are mutually reinforcing, challenging the misconception that value integration competes with skill acquisition.

Compared to existing models of IPE integration—such as the “content-embedding” approach or the “thematic module” model—the proposed three-pillar framework emphasizes systemic synergy among curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher development, rather than merely inserting ideological content into existing syllabi. For instance, while Wilder’s (2012) case-based integration method offers practicality, it does not systematically address teacher identity transformation or sustained professional community building—gaps that are addressed in this model through the Community of Practice and the four-phase implementation plan.

The model’s success depends on achieving authentic integration, not superficial ideological insertion. Drawing on Habermas’s (1984) *theory of communicative action*, authenticity can be understood as a learning environment approximating the “ideal speech situation,” where discourse aims at mutual understanding rather than strategic persuasion. When students engage in research, debate, and reflective dialogue about values embedded in their speeches, they participate in *communicative exploration* rather than passive acceptance. In this context, IPE becomes a process of self-discovery and critical engagement, allowing students to internalize moral principles through meaningful communication rather than through imposed doctrine.

A key dimension of this transformation lies in the evolving teacher identity. As integration shifts the instructor’s role from a technical coach to a facilitator of ethical dialogue, teachers inhabit what Beijard (2004) describe as a “third space,” where professional expertise merges with moral guidance. The proposed *Community of Practice (CoP)* serves as an *identity workspace* that enables teachers to negotiate this expanded role collaboratively, share reflective insights, and cultivate confidence in leading value-based discussions. The sustainability of the integration model depends largely on this professional transformation, as teachers who perceive themselves as co-learners and reflective practitioners are more likely to implement authentic, lasting change.

It is important to acknowledge that the integration model may increase teachers’ workload, particularly in curriculum redesign and facilitating reflective discourse. To mitigate this, we recommend staggered training sessions, the provision of teaching assistants for large classes, and the continued development of the shared online resource repository to reduce preparation time and ensure sustainable implementation.

Nonetheless, several challenges remain. Student resistance may arise if ideological content appears disconnected from authentic learning goals, highlighting the importance of the co-design and pilot refinement stages. Furthermore, while reflective journals and expanded rubrics effectively capture short-term shifts in awareness, assessing deep and sustained value internalization remains difficult. These limitations underline the importance of the proposed longitudinal tracking of alumni, which aims to trace the model’s influence on graduates’ civic engagement and ethical reasoning over time.

As a conceptual model, this study is limited by the absence of empirical validation. Future research should examine its feasibility across disciplines and institutions, applying mixed-methods or quasi-experimental designs to evaluate its pedagogical and ideological impact.

6.2. Conclusion

This study contributes to the field of curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education (IPE) by offering a comprehensive and theoretically grounded model for its integration into a skills-oriented course. The proposed framework demonstrates that rhetorical education can serve as a natural and powerful vehicle for value cultivation when informed by an interdisciplinary synthesis of *Curricular Synergy*, *Rhetorical Ethics*, *Constructivism*, and *Critical Pedagogy*.

1) Theoretical contribution.

The study advances theoretical discourse by bridging Eastern and Western educational traditions and conceptualizing a coherent integration ecosystem. It challenges the dichotomy between technical and moral education, revealing their potential synergy in communicative practice.

2) Practical contribution.

Through its three-pillar structure—Curricular Content, Pedagogical Practice, and Teacher Development—and the four-phase implementation plan, the study offers a replicable and adaptable framework for educators. The *Integrated Teaching Toolkit*, *Community of Practice*, and *multidimensional evaluation framework* provide actionable instruments for institutions seeking to embed IPE into skill-based curricula.

3) Directions for future research.

Empirical testing is essential to assess the model's effectiveness and scalability. Future studies should (a) compare learning outcomes between integrated and conventional classes, (b) explore how teacher identity evolves within the *Community of Practice*, and (c) conduct longitudinal investigations into graduates' civic behavior and ethical decision-making. Extending this framework to other applied courses—such as professional writing, critical thinking, or intercultural communication—may further promote holistic, ethically grounded education in Chinese higher education and beyond.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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