



On the Ideology and Political Education in ESP Courses Based on CBI Teaching Methodology

—A Case Study on *Selected Readings from the English Newspapers and Magazines*

Ying Huang

Department of College English, Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing, China

Email: 964299532@qq.com

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the connotation of ideology and political education in one of the ESP (English for Special Purposes) courses—*Selected Readings from the English Newspapers and Magazines*, and conducts an empirical study based on the CBI teaching method to explore how to effectively integrate the ideology and political education into the actual teaching under the current trend of advocating new liberal arts in China. The research adopts pre-class interviews, classroom observations, and post-class questionnaires to collect students' real feedback on the course under the CBI teaching method. The result shows that through the use of online teaching resources, the blended teaching approach can effectively promote the development of students' "key competencies". Meanwhile, this research also proved the effectiveness of the CBI teaching method on the ideology and political education of the ESP courses.

Subject Areas

Language Education

Keywords

ESP, CBI Teaching Methodology, Ideology and Political Education, "Key Competencies"

1. Introduction to ESP Courses

The study of ESP (English for Specific/Special Purposes) started in 1962 when the British Scholar C. L. Barber first published the article "Some measurable characteristics of modern scientific prose" (Barber, 1962) [1]. After 50 years of

development, the research gradually developed from the initial register analysis, discourse analysis, target situation analysis, skills and strategies to the present learning-centered stage, which has matured. Now, the ESP specifically refers to English related to a particular occupation or discipline. There is also a wide range of research areas, such as ESP classification (Mackay & Mountford, 1978 [2]; Carver, 1983 [3]; Hutchinson, 1987 [4]; Jordan, 1997 [5]), teaching methods (Palmero, 2002 [6]; Arani, 2005 [7]), needs analysis (Munby, 1978) [8], materials design (Rahman, 2008) [9], teacher training (Robinson, 1991) [10], etc. Since the 1990s, influenced by the rapid development of the Internet, the computer-based corpus research and assessment test research have increased dramatically. Therefore, such interdisciplinary and multidimensional research has broadened the original scope of ESP research.

The domestic study of ESP starts from the late 1970s to the 1980s, the introductory papers on ESP courses and related teaching materials first appeared, such as the first two related papers published by Professor Yang Huizhong in 1978. The two papers, namely “Teaching and Research on English for Science and Technology” (Yang, 1978) [11] and “Dynamics of Teaching and Research on English for Science and Technology Abroad” (Yang, 1978) [12] both belong to the general introductions. Since then, it gradually appeared more researches focused on the general classification of ESP, its connotations, the comparison and contrast between ESP courses in China and abroad, etc. Overall, most of the research is introductory articles, while it did comparatively lack of the empirical research.

In terms of the teaching situation of ESP in China, it has already been widely acknowledged that ESP teaching not only includes the training of English language skills, but also has obvious professional connotations, being a combination of language skills training and professional knowledge learning. Therefore, the overall aim of the ESP course is to “strengthen the foundation, broaden the specialism, improve the ability and apply the learning”, *i.e.*, to develop students’ practical application skills in the target context, which is more relevant, practical, and professional. At the meantime, ESP can also be used as a pedagogical approach that emphasizes academic skills rather than subject knowledge. This broad term is the one that focuses on linguistic communication skills in the discipline, *i.e.* academic English. Jordan (1997) [5] introduced the concept of General English for Academic Purposes (EGAP), arguing that ESP should teach what is common to language across disciplines. Anthony (1997, 2011) [13] also argues that “ESP should not necessarily target a particular discipline, but rather teach communicative strategies and skills in that area. This is precisely the new trend in international ESP—a shift from specialized language to specialized communication (Boswood 1994) [14].

Considering such situations, Zhejiang Yuexiu Foreign Language University has developed a series of ESP elective courses for undergraduate students in non-English majors, one of which is *Selected Readings of English Newspapers and Magazines*. The course covers two main modules:

1) The interdisciplinary knowledge, which includes knowledge of news, modern media, advertising, communication, and digital communication ethics, traditional media, features of news, political and cultural background in Western news reports, etc.;

2) The critical reading skills, which include ten critical reading skills.

By integrating English language with journalism and communication disciplines, this course aims to expand students' knowledge and enhance their critical thinking skills.

2. Literature Review

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is a teaching model that has emerged in the United States since the 1970s. Specifically, it is a second language teaching method that combines subject-specific or thematic content with second language teaching. With the CBI teaching method, we teachers can teach professional knowledge and language skills at the same time in students' language courses, so that students can learn professional knowledge and improve their language skills together.

According to research from CNKI through imputing the keyword "CBI" and "College English teaching", I've found 184 papers, 6 of them are Master Theses and 1 of them is PH. D thesis, while the rest are academic journals. According to the further reading, I've noticed that teachers in various universities in China have already made a series of empirical studies based on the CBI teaching model in the teaching of English subjects, and the results have fully confirmed its effectiveness. For example, Yuan Pinghua pointed out that the CBI teaching model can effectively improve students' motivation to learn English, reduce students' anxiety in language learning, and help develop students' critical thinking, especially the ability to identify hypotheses, induction and deduction (Yuan, 2012) [15]; Tao Jifen pointed out in her research on English speaking courses that the CBI teaching model combined with the CBI can help improve students' critical thinking ability and English language ability (Tao, 2019) [16]; Yao Xiaojuan, on the other hand, found through her study of business English course teaches that the CBI teaching model was beneficial to students' interest in learning(Yao, 2020) [17]; Mao Yaying *et al.* concluded that CBI teaching played a greater role in promoting non-English majors' interest in learning English and their English language ability (Mao, 2013) [18]. All of the results of these empirical studies show that the CBI teaching mode has a facilitating effect on the teaching of English subjects.

In addition, the results of the existing research show that papers and empirical studies on the ideology and political education of English courses have also developed rapidly in recent 10 years. For example, in the case of the University general English course, An Xiumei and Li Ping both point out the need to strengthen the teaching concept (An, 2018) [19], innovate the content of teaching materials and improve teachers' awareness of their thinking and political

skills (Li, 2018) [20], etc.; Yang Jing focuses on how to combine the content of the University English textbook and add relevant elements of curriculum thinking and political education (Yang, 2020) [21], and Sun Youzhong proposes a macro-responsive reform of foreign language teaching materials (Sun, 2020) [22]; in the case of the English major course, Li Zhiying, in relation to the English-Chinese Translation” course, proposed a structure of teaching Civics based on emotional learning theory (Li, 2020 [23]); Lin Zhong *et al.* dissected an effective way to combine the “Basic English” course of English majors with ideology and political elements (Lin, *et al.*, 2021) [24].

However, it is obvious that most of the current studies mainly concentrate on the teachers’ offline classroom teaching or face-to-face teaching mode, which is relatively focused on the relevant curriculum areas of English majors from the theoretical level, and there is a relative lack of empirical research based on the acceptance of student subjects and the research of ESP courses for non-English majors. At the same time, there are still a lack of the clear criteria on how to effectively measure and evaluate the acceptance of students as classroom subjects in ideology and political education research.

Therefore, this research choose the ESP courses for students from non-English majors in Zhejiang Yuexiu University as the research objects, by taking the CBI teaching as the research methodology, and *Selected Readings of English Newspapers and Magazines* as the typical course to exemplify and aims to further explore how to effectively integrate the research on the course ideology and political education in the teaching practice, including teaching content, teaching method and teaching evaluation.

3. Methodology

This research takes one of the ESP courses—*The Selected Readings in English Newspapers and Magazines* as a case study and aims to examine the effectiveness of the blend teaching methods in combining publishing teaching materials, English news, and videos online and unit exercises and discussion questions offline. Thus, students’ online assignments and feedbacks are dynamically observed.

In our teaching practice, the course was taught offline for 18 weeks. At the beginning of the course, we conducted the interviews randomly and face-to-face to investigate students’ real learning motivations by asking them questions like “Why did you choose the course?/What do you expect to learn from the course?/What’s your exact purpose for learning English by reading newspapers or magazines? etc. Then, an online survey was also conducted at the end of the course.

Then, an online survey was also conducted at the end of the course to analyze the students’ feedback on the course qualitatively and quantitatively.

The questionnaire consisted of 24 questions, including 12 single choice questions, 6 multiple choice questions and 6 fill-in-the-blank questions. The questions were divided into three types: the first is about students’ background in-

formation (question 1) and the second is about the content of the course (questions 2 to 12) and the third category is the teaching elements of the course (questions 13 to 24).

The questionnaire was designed for sophomore non-English majors of Zhejiang Yuexiu University in Shaoxing from 2019-2022. A total of 153 questionnaires were distributed, and 141 valid questionnaires were returned.

4. Teaching Practice of Curriculum Ideology and Political Education

4.1. Integrating and Reconstructing Teaching Contents

In September 2017, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on deepening the reform of the education system and mechanism (hereinafter referred to as the Opinions) (by General Office of the CPC Central Committee and General Office of the State Council in 2017). The Opinions state that “emphasis should be placed on cultivating key competencies that support lifelong development and meet the requirements of the times. In the process of cultivating students’ basic knowledge and fundamental skills, it’s also important to strengthen students’ key competencies”. Professor Wen Qiufang has pointed out that “key competencies are migratory, flexible, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary in nature (Wen, 2021) [25].” In foreign language courses, Professor Wen further proposed the six key competencies illustrated below, which are Language competency, Learning competency, Critical thinking competency, Cultural competency, and Creative competency, Cultural competency, Creative competency, and Collaborative competency. In the globalized era, it’s essential to cultivate students’ key competencies to convey a clear and effective individual voice to the world.

The curriculum is both the fundamental element of teaching and learning, and an important basis for the teaching innovation of ideology and political education in this course. From the perspective of classroom teaching, Professor Wen Qiufang interpreted the connotation of the foreign language course on ideology and political education as “taking the foreign language teacher as the leader, through the foreign language teaching content, classroom management, evaluation system, teachers’ words and actions, etc., the concept of moral education is organically integrated into all aspects of foreign language classroom teaching, and is committed to playing an active role in shaping students’ correct world view, outlook on life and values (Wen, 2018) [26].”

Therefore, in the teaching process, apart from the textbooks selected reading articles, I also selected the latest reading materials from the world’s major mainstream media, in order to further guide students to compare and analyze the differences represented in news value orientations between the Chinese and Western mainstream media, such as *China Daily*, *BBC news*, *The Washington Post*, *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Times* and other specific news

platforms. The news adopted from these newspapers and magazines is employed as the content carriers in the teaching process, with various themes closely following the global economy, education, culture, and other latest topics of high concern to students. For example, in this semester, I've chosen one of the articles from the *Economist*, namely, "*The serious business of being a social influencer*". Through the comparison of the famous social influencers' phenomenon in China and abroad, students are more accepting of the similarities in the consumption of pop culture and become clearer about the differences underlined between the different social backgrounds.

Students are also suggested to master the interdisciplinary knowledge modules by watching the online micro-lectures, and related video clips before the class, and the offline classes are mainly organized through group discussion and topic presentations, to train their critical reading and thinking abilities, focusing on the development of "key competencies". It is worth noting that "key competencies" are not only important in students' learning at school, but are also significant for their long-term development, including their future career and interpersonal interactions. Therefore, we mainly focus on the development of implicit thinking through the teaching of comparative analysis of specific cases.

Before our teaching innovation, we found that, through questionnaires and random interviews, the three main problems of the course were:

- 1) The overemphasis on test-taking language skills, but not on independent thinking and discernment.
- 2) The lack of combination between the content of the textbook with existing information resources, especially the widely acknowledged information from the Internet by students, such as their favorite platforms *i.e.* Bilibili, Little Red Book, Zhihu, etc.
- 3) The lack of close integration with the reality impedes students' intrinsic motivation to learn.

According to the questionnaires and face-to-face survey (randomly chosen), I've investigated students from Western language faculty, Oriental language faculty, Management faculty, I found that the most agreed objective of English learning for students is still to improve their passing rate or score of the CET-4 and CET-6 examinations. What's more, students are greatly influenced by their previous English learning habits so they have become accustomed to rote memorization and problem-solving to improve their correctness and mastery of English knowledge, such as vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing.

Considering such problems, the innovations in the teaching of *Selected Readings of English Newspapers and Magazines* to help students focus on the integration and expansion of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary learning objective. For non-English undergraduates, it's essential to guide students to find their inner motivations to inspire them to further their learning. Through reading foreign newspapers and magazines, especially the news from original foreign media, can expand their knowledge and improve their vocabulary comprehension,

as well as enhance their media literacy, strengthen their international awareness, and develop their critical thinking skills and independent thinking habits. For example, there are many electrical Newspapers and even WeChat mini-program with plenty of information ranging from hard news like economics, politics, military affairs, education to soft news as entertainment in the different columns. So, students can enjoy reading from their favorite parts and it's quite helpful to stimulate their reading interests and keep it as a long-term habit.

According to the survey, students accumulate vocabulary mainly through the textbook vocabulary lists or vocabulary books of Integrated English. Students do not have a complete time for additional vocabulary learning because they merely aim to pass the tests. The teaching of reading selected articles from English newspapers and magazines can make up for this gap. During reading, students are completely exposed to many high-frequency words, as well as different types of statements, and the real context promotes understanding of grammatical structures and collocation forms. During reading, students can therefore deepen their memory of a series of vocabulary and build up a personal initial body of knowledge. This is supplemented by the teacher's classroom tutorials, which help students to further refine their knowledge. At the same time, students are exposed to a number of cultural, political, and other normative terms in English, which they can apply in their future reading and writing.

Hence, during the teaching process, we have reset the objectives of the course, breaking through the pure language dimension of reading comprehension training, by adding a certain depth and breadth of analysis of foreign press articles, helping students to gain a comprehensive understanding of international public opinion and enhance their international awareness. The students' analytical skills and sense of discernment are further enhanced.

I also used a variety of teaching aids during the teaching process in the previous semesters, especially online shared resources from the China MOOC platform, online courses in our university shared platforms, etc. I usually require students to preview the related resources before the class, and mainly organize students to engage in independent learning and seminars in class, in order to maximize the use of class time and improve the efficiency of lessons. Through the most intuitive and visual ways—including auditory, visual, and tactile—it can bring a better teaching environment to students, thus facilitating smooth teaching and enhancing their motivation and learning.

4.2. Management of Teaching and Learning Environment

In recent years, our university has introduced a wide range of multimedia resources, including various online resources, and other excellent courses and we also upgraded the traditional classroom with modern multimedia equipment. However, this equipment has not been fully utilized, unfortunately. First, in the teaching of text analysis and appreciation, the "selected reading" has often been directly taught in the form of reading comprehension class, using skipping and

skimming as the main reading skills. Besides, because the text in this textbook is relatively not the latest news in terms of subject matter, there is a gap between it and real life. What's more, some of the content is a little bit obscure and far away from students' reality, such as the discussion of the reasons for Economic Crises in 1929, 2008, U.S. These articles are kind of out of date so it would sometimes affect students understanding. For this reason, it's important for teachers to bridge the gap between the textbook and the latest news through the effective utilization of modern multimedia, for example, to lead students to do their own survey about the different economic crises from the newspapers and magazines in the diachronic comparison. If you ignore the use of various media and teach from a textbook, the teaching may not be as effective as it could be. The use of classroom pictures, supplemented with relevant audio/video for an in-depth explanation, would have made the content more flexible and memorable for students.

As this course is offered in the third year, 5th semester of university (4 years, 8 semesters in total), many students are under huge pressure to prepare further their study in the specific majors and thus have a weak sense of purpose and motivation for learning the course. For example, students who are preparing for applying their postgraduate school are more concerned with their examination points/GPA in the postgraduate entrance examinations and lack the desire to explore other knowledge, while students who are planning to work also find that the English reading course seems has less practical application in their future jobs, so it is also difficult to arouse their interests and attentions.

Therefore, it's essential to help students find the inner connections between the course content and their needs. For example, for the students who aim to prepare for further study, I exemplified the ability needed for the test and in the course learning through the reading basis. What's more, for the job-oriented aims students, it's also important for them to grasp a general understanding of the globalized world. In our teaching process, the class is conducted through pre-class research by questionnaires distributed on the DingDing/Yunbanke, our university U-Mooc platform, etc., and real-time voting on the "Kahoot!" to understand students' learning needs and problems. The targets of the survey include students from International Business, Business Administration and Logistics Management in the class of 2015, students of Russian, Italian, French, Spanish, German and Portuguese each in the class of 2017, and students of Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, Thai, Arabic, Russian, Italian, French, Spanish, German and Portuguese each in the class of 2020. According to the data collected from students' feedback, it shows that although there have been some demands for reading skills improvement in the last five years, this has not actually been transferred into expectations and motivation to study the course.

In the offline classroom teaching, the ideology and political education need to start from a small place, for example: as soon as the teacher enters the classroom, he/she can directly feel whether the learning atmosphere with the students is

harmonious and harmonious. Therefore, the first thing this course concentrates on is the classroom seating situation, especially in large classes. Many students tend to choose to sit at the back of the classroom and are sparsely distributed throughout the classroom, giving a general impression of slackness and laziness. Therefore, from the very first session, everyone is asked to sit neatly in the front row before the class begins. Insisting on setting the rules from the first meeting and the first lesson, and reasoning with students so that they can fully agree with this rule from the bottom of their hearts, is conducive to conscious compliance and a virtuous cycle of teaching and learning environment later.

4.3. Explicit Teaching and Learning Assessment Including the Ideology and Political Education Elements

The National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) states that schools should “focus on the integration of learning and thinking, advocate inspiring, inquiry, discussion, and participatory teaching, and help students learn to learn. We, teachers, need to stimulate students’ curiosity, cultivate their interests, and create a good environment for independent thinking, free exploration and innovation. For example, by examining with students specific reports in British and American mainstream media newspapers such as *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *Times*, *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, it was found that although the content of the reports was diverse, the linguistic approach was driven by political purposes and mostly presented “demonization” and “headline gimmicks. The language used in these reports is often “demonizing” and “gimmicky headlines” due to political objectives. For example, in the *Washington Post*, there happened to mention the phrase “sick man of Asia” in one of the news headlines but the whole content has little connection with the title. After the fully researching the news, students are more comprehensive about the political elements underlined in the news reports. At the same time, there are many reports that contain metaphors in their language. When students are facing and reading these materials, the course has already incorporated elements of political thinking, leading students to read in depth and compare and analyze the language used and the intentions of some of the reports, so that students can raise their national and international awareness and stimulate their patriotism.

It is particularly important to lead students aware of the importance of ideology and political education. There is no good or bad classification between cultures or political systems, the differences exist because of the region and reality. Through reading, exploring and communicating in a critical way, the different cultures would find a way to better understand each other and to realize overwhelmingly improvements.

The extensive reading of foreign newspapers and magazines enhances students’ critical thinking skills and develops their independent thinking habits. Although theoretically, foreign media reports uphold the principle of fairness

and impartiality, the language of the articles is different from that presented in ordinary textbooks, so students need to read them with the correct values and take the initiative to judge the facts reported, rather than blindly believing them and making generalizations. This course takes an innovative approach to international current affairs, selecting newspapers and magazines from the appropriate time to provide students with reading, such as the recent 3 years COVID-19 period, which has received widespread attention and coverage from society worldwide. Take the British and American mainstream newspapers as an example, the initial and recent reports in the Western media are very different in terms of content and views. Teachers can lead students in discussions while reading, comparing the different reports, and analyzing the changes in political stance and tendencies of the current situation. At the end of the lesson, by encouraging students to collect relevant information after class, interested students can form cooperative groups and work together to compare and analyze the content of domestic and international reports and make judgments and summaries. In this way, the undesirable teaching situation of rote learning and wholesale application and acceptance can be changed, and students can develop the habit of independent thinking, form critical thinking, and give full play to their subjective initiative.

In terms of the specific assessment system, first, we try to diversify the assessment subjects as much as possible. In addition to teacher assessment, we actively open student-student mutual assessment, self-assessment, and group-assessment activities. Students are encouraged to learn how to know themselves and others objectively and truthfully, in addition to learning language knowledge, and are guided to engage in more self-reflection and to improve their ability and awareness of peer cooperation.

Secondly, regarding the universality and diversity features of student differences, the assessment process should combine both formative and summative assessment with attention to the actual differences between individual students, paying as much attention as possible to the growth of each student in a multidimensional and dynamic way, for example, by measuring the students' usual level of effort and progress and by evaluating them as objectively as possible, taking into account the basic situation of different students.

Finally, in the whole course teaching process, our practical attention should be paid to the value-oriented issues that are linked to the content. Due to the rapid development of self-media, students are often exposed to a wide range of opinions on different social media and online platforms. For example, in the topic of "Film and Review", we introduced the latest film "Turning Red", which was shot by the Chinese American female director and vividly represents young girls growing puzzles. Meanwhile, the film also contains many Chinese elements, which tightly relate to inter-generational family conflicts, cultural identity perception differences, negative stereotypes of ethnic Chinese and Chinese culture in Western media reports, and many other social issues, like the sense of belonging for the emigrations and their offspring. Therefore, during the teaching

process and assessment, students are easily combined with their own experience and consciously raised many relevant value-oriented questions, and through group work and discussion, it's more acceptable to guide them to think deeply and correct their errors in values in a gentle manner.

5. Summary

This research combines the relevant documents of the Ministry of Education and the connotations of many scholars and professors in the teaching of English language courses. Based on my own limited teaching practice and reflection on the course “Selected Readings of English Newspapers and Magazines and Periodicals”, this research mainly focuses on the innovation of the teaching of English for Special Purposes course, and discusses how to integrate the ideology and political education of the course into the teaching of the course “silently” in the new era. This paper also explores how to integrate the course content into the teaching and learning practice and promote the development of students’ “key competencies”. The research adopts pre-class interviews and surveys, classroom observations, and post-class questionnaires to collect students’ real feedback on the course under the CBI teaching method and fully proved the effectiveness of the content-based teaching method on the ESP course.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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