

Research on the Ideological and Political Teaching Practice of Higher Vocational English Courses Based on the Theme of Ecological Protection

– Exemplified by China's Desert Control Projects and Campus-Based Project Learning

Chen Zhang¹, Gang Li²

¹Tianjin Binhai Vocational College of Automotive Engineering, Tianjin 300352, China

²Tianjin University of Technology and Education, Tianjin 300222, China

How to cite this paper: Zhang, C., & Li, G. (2025). Research on the ideological and political teaching practice of higher vocational English courses based on the theme of ecological protection – Exemplified by China's desert control projects and campus-based project learning. *Educational and Humanities*, 1(3), 15-22. ISSN Print: 3104-4352; ISSN Online: 3104-4360. <https://doi.org/10.63313/EH.9019>
Published: 2025-11-19

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Abstract

This study focuses on the topic of "ecological protection", which bears distinct characteristics of the times and Chinese features, and explores the mode and path for its in-depth integration with curriculum-based ideological and political education in higher vocational English courses. Addressing the problems in higher vocational English teaching such as unbalanced cultural introduction and insufficient value guidance, this paper takes the concept of "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" as the core, and constructs a four-dimensional integrated teaching content system of "global perspective - Chinese wisdom - local action - professional literacy". Through the action research method, ideological and political elements such as the concept of ecological civilization, the feelings for the motherland, the craftsmanship spirit and the concept of sustainable development have been systematically integrated into teaching practice, and diversified teaching methods such as case comparison and project-driven learning have been adopted. Teaching practice shows that this mode can not only effectively improve students' comprehensive English application ability, but also significantly enhance their recognition of China's ecological governance concept, their awareness of professional responsibilities and their willingness to actively participate in ecological protection. It provides an effective solution for cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents with ecological civilization literacy.

Keywords

Ecological Conservation; Higher Vocational English; Curriculum Ideology and Politics; Ecological Civilization; Teaching Practice

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Significance

1.1.1. Policy Background

"Curriculum-based ideological and political education" is clearly proposed as a new educational concept. It emphasizes integrating ideological and political education into the talent training system, fully promoting the development of such education across all disciplines, and achieving comprehensive education involving all staff, the entire process and all aspects.

Subsequently, the Ministry of Education issued a series of documents including the "Guidelines for the Construction of Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education in Institutions of Higher Education". These documents clearly state that "to fulfill the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, it is necessary to integrate value shaping, knowledge impartment and ability development into one, which cannot be separated". They also require all teachers and all courses to take on the responsibility of educating people, so that various courses and ideological and political theory courses can work in the same direction and form a synergistic effect.

1.1.2. Era Background

With the rapid development of industrial civilization, the world is facing severe ecological challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution. Against this background, China has placed the construction of ecological civilization in an overall and prominent position in national development. The important development concept of "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" deeply reveals the dialectical and unified relationship between economic development and environmental protection, and has become a consensus and action guide of the whole society. To build a beautiful China and achieve the sustainable development of the Chinese nation, it requires builders and successors with ecological civilization literacy[1].

1.1.3. Practical Problems

In higher vocational English teaching, there exist such problems as insufficient exploration of ideological and political elements, rigid integration of these elements, and low relevance to students' majors and future careers. Although curriculum-based ideological and political education has been promoted in an all-round way, there are still some common problems in the specific practice of higher vocational English teaching:

First, the exploration of ideological and political elements is insufficient and their integration is superficial. Many teaching practices only stay at the simple superposition of "language points + ideological and political slogans"[2].

Second, teaching content is divorced from students' reality. Some ideological and political materials have low relevance to students' lives, professional backgrounds and future careers, making it difficult to arouse students' emotional resonance and ideological recognition, thus resulting in half the teaching effect with double the effort.

Third, teaching methods are single and the effect of value guidance is limited. Most teaching is dominated by teachers' one-way indoctrination, lacking teaching designs that allow students to experience in practice and perceive through exploration. This makes value guidance stay at the cognitive level and hard to be effectively internalized into students' practical actions and firm beliefs.

Fourth, the characteristics of higher vocational education are not prominent. It fails to fully align with the school-running orientation of vocational education, which is "market-oriented, serving development and promoting employment", and also fails to combine ideological and political education with the cultivation of students' professional ethics, craftsmanship spirit and post competence.

2. Teaching Practice Cases and Analysis

2.1. Case 1: Case Study - Course Activity Design "From 'Saihanba' to 'Kubuqi': Narrating China's Desert Control Stories"

2.1.1. Teaching Objectives

Language Skill Objective: Students will be able to recognize and use core vocabulary related to the theme.

Expression and Communication Objectives: Students will be able to use simple English sentence patterns to describe. They will be able to participate in group discussions, using English to compare the similarities and differences between the two models (for example, "Both... but..."; "The main difference is...").

Curriculum-based ideological and political education & value cultivation objectives: Ecological civilization awareness. Through China's successful sand control cases, students' sense of national pride, feelings for the motherland and awareness of ecological civilization will be enhanced, and they will deeply understand the development concept of "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets".

2.1.2. Student Analysis

The students of this course are freshmen in the first year of the Automotive Engineering College of a higher vocational college. These students have a relatively weak English foundation. Their mastery of vocabulary related to ecological environment is quite limited, they have low sensitivity to English words, and they face great difficulties in learning new words. They also have insufficient abilities in oral expression and writing. However, they have strong information retrieval skills and can efficiently search for the information they need.

Therefore, we can make use of this advantage: when they encounter unfamiliar words in the course, they can search for these words in groups and complete the task collaboratively.

2.1.3. Key and Difficult Teaching Points

Teaching focus: Strengthen students' awareness of ecological protection and integrate the ideology of ecological civilization into their daily study and life.

Teaching difficulty: Students have insufficient English expression skills for professional terms related to the ecological environment. They need to understand and use basic English expressions about the ecological environment, and be able to use their personal vocabulary bank for oral expression and complete written expression.

2.1.4. Course Implementation

1) Pre-class Preparation: With the help of multimedia resources, students will watch relevant English videos and read related materials before class. By comparing the differences between China's Saihanba and Kubuqi sand control models (as shown in Table 1), students can intuitively perceive the efforts made by the country to improve the ecological environment.

Characteristics	Kubuqi Model	Saihanba Model
Core Driving Force	Market-driven, Industry-driven	National Mission, Administratively-driven
Leading Force	Leading Enterprise (Elion Group); Government, Local People	State-owned Forest Farm (Government); Forest Farm Workers
Primary Source of Funding	Enterprise Investment, Industrial Revenue	National Financial Allocation
Core Logic	Develop industries through restoration, and promote restoration through industrial development (Sustainable and Profitable)	Restoration first, utilization later (More focused on ecological benefits)
Key Technologies	Licorice-based Desert Control, Minimally Invasive Tree Planting, Ecological Solar Power	Large Sapling Transplantation, Drought-tolerant Species Breeding, Mechanized Afforestation
Philosophy	"Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" (directly convert ecological value into economic value)	"Remember the mission, work hard with pioneering spirit"

Table 1. Comparison of Saihanba and Kubuqi Models

2) During the class, raise questions based on the content in the table and list them one by one as follows:

1. What is the main difference between the Kubuqi Model and the Saihanba Model?
2. Who leads the work in the Kubuqi desert control? And who leads the work in the Saihanba desert control?
3. What are the main sources of funding for the Kubuqi Model and the Saihanba Model respectively?
4. What is the core logic of the Kubuqi Model? How does it differ from that of the Saihanba Model?
5. What key technologies are used in the Kubuqi Model? And what key technologies are applied in the Saihanba Model?
6. What philosophy guides the Kubuqi Model? And what philosophy supports the Saihanba Model?
7. What can we learn from the Saihanba spirit reflected in its desert control model?

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8. What is the global significance of China's desert-control stories (represented by the Kubuqi and Saihanba Models)?

9. How can China's desert-control experience inspire other countries that are facing similar desertification challenges?

10. From the perspective of "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets", how does the Kubuqi Model embody the conversion of ecological value into economic value?

3) Discussion and Analysis: Students will be divided into groups to discuss the connotation of the desert-control spirit and the key factors for its success. During the discussion, ideological and political elements such as the spirit of hard work and perseverance, confidence in the system, feelings for the motherland, and a global perspective should be integrated[3]. Each group needs to collect the questions raised by its members and organize them in English. Then, the groups will conduct discussions, make full use of their online search skills to find relevant information, and sort out the answers. After the discussion, all members of each group will go to the podium to report on the discussed questions in English. Finally, based on the questions and content covered in their report, each group will write an English article of about 200 words. There is an example of a group's English report: Two Ways to Green China.

China has two great examples of how to bring back green land: Saihanba and Kubuqi.

Saihanba was a government project. The country gave money and people worked very hard for many years to plant trees. They built a huge forest to protect the environment. Their main goal was to help nature.

Kubuqi was different. A company led the work. They found ways to make money from the desert, like by planting special plants and using the sun for power. They believed that helping the environment could also be good for business.

For us students, Saihanba teaches us about hard work. Kubuqi teaches us to be smart and creative. We can learn from both.

2.2. Case 2: Project-Based Learning – "Design a Campus Environmental Initiative"

2.2.1. Implementation Background and Objectives

Implementation Background: There is a phenomenon of resource waste in the school, such as leaving lights on when leaving classrooms, not turning off computers after use, using paper only on one side, and wasting drinking water. Garbage classification is merely a formality; recyclables like plastic bottles and express packages are randomly discarded.

The environmental awareness of people on campus is weak. Most teachers and students have insufficient knowledge of environmental protection and fail to translate

the concept of environmental protection into daily actions.

Implementation Goals: Enable students to develop a strong sense of social responsibility and ownership. Guide students to recognize that the campus environment is everyone's responsibility, and shift their mindset from "being asked to protect the environment" to "taking the initiative to protect the environment". Guide students to identify problems around them, analyze these problems, and solve them in creative ways. By combining the knowledge learned in class with real-world problems, help students transform from passive listeners who receive knowledge to active observers of the campus environment, responsible participants in environmental protection, and promoters of green changes. This is not only a learning activity, but also a meaningful civic practice.

2.2.2. Implementation Process

1) **Scenario Introduction:** Before class, students will watch a short video about environmental issues or excellent environmental protection initiatives. Based on the content of the video, they will conduct a brainstorming session. Then, they will be divided into groups to discuss and list all environmental problems observed on campus (for example, unclear garbage classification, food waste during lunch, lights left on in unoccupied classrooms, running water in restrooms).

2) **Team Formation:** Students will form project teams based on their interests or the environmental issue areas they focus on. Examples of team names include "Electricity-saving Team" and "Plastic Reduction Vanguard". Each team should clarify the division of roles among members, such as team leader, recorder, designer, and spokesperson.

3) **Field Research and Information Collection:** Teams will carry recording tools to conduct fixed-point observation and recording in specific campus areas (such as classrooms or beside trash cans), and carry out data measurement. The "Electricity-saving Team" will record the number of classrooms where lights are not turned off after class. The "Plastic Reduction Vanguard" will calculate the proportion of recyclables in trash cans. Both teams will conduct on-site data recording continuously for one week.

4) **Interviews and Questionnaires:** First, calculate the proportions based on the surveyed data. Then, design English questionnaires or interview outlines according to the identified problems to investigate teachers' and students' opinions and habits regarding a specific environmental issue—this helps address the problem at its root. For example: If garbage sorting is ineffective, is it because the signs on trash bins are unclear? Is there not enough publicity? Or do people find it too much trouble to sort trash? For lights left on after class, do people think turning off the lights is neither teachers' nor students' responsibility?

Students can use the following English expressions directly when putting forward interview questions: "Why is garbage sorting poor? Are the signs on trash bins un-

clear? Is there not enough education? Do people find it too much trouble to categorize the trash? Do people think leaving lights on is not their responsibility?"

The results for the both projects: The both teams will use Excel to create charts based on the data collected on the same day, making it easier for data statistics and analysis.

For the Electricity-saving Team, the following is the background of their statistics: They conducted a random one-week survey in the Training Building of the Automotive Engineering College, focusing on whether the lights were turned off after class in the classrooms. The statistical table is as follows (Table 2).

Time Date	10:15	12:15	2:45	4:45	6:45	8:45
2025.9.22	2	1	2	2	1	0
2025.9.23	1	2	1	2	1	1
2025.9.24	2	1	0	0	1	0
2025.9.25	2	0	2	1	0	1
2025.9.26	1	1	2	1	0	0

Table 2. The result of how many classrooms have the light kept on after class in a week

However, the Plastic Reduction Vanguard conducted observations at the school's waste recycling station and found that the waste included paper products (such as express packaging boxes, printing paper, and books), plastic products (such as plastic bottles, food packaging bags, and plastic bags), metal products (such as cans), and glass products (such as beer bottles and beverage bottles). The proportion of recyclable items ranged from 50% to 70%.

5) Initiative Action: Write an English proposal, and create English promotional posters or short videos. Use the English sentence patterns learned in class to clearly explain the environmental problems identified, put forward specific initiative actions, and illustrate the significance of these actions.

2.2.3. Teaching Practice Effect Evaluation and Analysis

In Case 1, after students learned about the Saihanba Model and Kubuqi Model in the course, each group discussed and worked out answers to their own questions, then organized these answers into English articles. During the English class, students internalized the knowledge about ecological and environmental issues. The teacher displayed excellent articles in class for other students to refer to and learn from.

In Case 2, after sorting out the collected data, the environmental problems were visualized. For analyzing the root causes of the problems, thinking tools such as "Five Whys" were used to explore the in-depth reasons behind the problems. Based on students' research on electricity use and waste recycling on campus, the following findings were obtained: Teachers and students have the awareness of saving

electricity in daily life, but there are occasional cases of forgetting to turn off lights; As for the high proportion of recyclables in the waste, the current infrastructure related to classified waste disposal is not sufficient, teachers and students have a low awareness of waste classification, and there is no incentive mechanism for promoting waste classification. In addition, students do not attach importance to classified waste disposal[4] and tend to ignore it. Therefore, students wrote English proposals, created English promotional posters or short videos to raise environmental protection awareness. Finally, excellent student works were selected and displayed as material evidence of teaching effectiveness.

Both cases encourage students to tell China's environmental protection stories in English, an international language, and demonstrate the responsibility of Chinese youth. Students are guided to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses, and internalize the project experience into a part of their personal growth. The project-based learning process should focus on students' emotional experience[5]. The outlook on life, world outlook and values of higher vocational college students are just taking shape but not yet stable. If teachers only mechanically explain ideas or principles, it is difficult for students to empathize. In the teaching design, students are encouraged to try to solve practical problems and actively participate in project-based learning, which stimulates their enthusiasm for exploration.

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