

A Study on Discourse Guidance Strategies of Adult English Teachers under the Orientation of Ideological and Political Education

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Abstract: In the era of comprehensive advancement of "Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education," adult English education not only involves the imparting of language skills but also carries the significant mission of value guidance and cultural cultivation. Adult learners possess unique cognitive and psychological characteristics that differ from those of students in basic education stages. Their learning motivations often stem from practical needs, and their thinking patterns tend to be more critical and independent. Consequently, rigidly implanting ideological and political elements or presenting them in a didactic manner can easily trigger learning resistance. Teacher discourse, as the core medium of classroom instruction, directly influences the effectiveness of achieving the goals of ideological and political education through its guidance strategies. Grounded in adult learning theory and discourse analysis theory, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the current difficulties faced in guiding ideological and political discourse within adult English teaching. It systematically proposes core discourse guidance strategies for adult English teachers under the orientation of ideological and political education from four dimensions: constructing relevance-oriented discourse, employing inquiry-based discourse, implementing encouraging discourse, and fostering empathetic discourse. The aim is to promote the deep integration of ideological and political education with adult English teaching, achieving an organic unity between "fostering virtue through education" and language empowerment.

Keywords: Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education; adult English; teacher discourse; guidance strategies; discourse analysis

Introduction

On February 27, 2017, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities Under the New Circumstances, which emphasized that strengthening and improving ideological and political work in higher education requires adhering to the principle of fostering integrity and cultivating character through education by all staff, throughout the entire process, and across all dimensions. The fundamental task of fostering virtue through education must be integrated into every aspect of ideological and moral education, cultural knowledge education, and social practice education. Ideological and political work must permeate the entire process of education and teaching, with ideological and value guidance running through all stages and links. As a key component of the national lifelong learning system, adult English education has seen its function expand from mere language skill training to multiple dimensions, including enhancing personal comprehensive qualities, broadening international perspectives, and strengthening cultural confidence. In this context, the deepening advancement of the "Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education" concept has endowed adult English education with new contemporary significance and educational missions. It requires that teaching activities not only "impart knowledge" and "resolve doubts" but also "teach principles," subtly integrating ideological and value guidance into the process of teaching language knowledge and skills. However, the practice of "Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education" in adult English teaching faces unique challenges. Adult learners typically possess rich social experience, stable value systems, and strong learning autonomy. They have higher demands regarding the practicality, relevance, and logical coherence of teaching content. Traditional, directive discourse of ideological and political education, if directly transplanted into the adult English classroom, is not only difficult to accept but may even weaken learners' intrinsic motivation due to its

perceived "preachiness" and "tacked-on" nature. Therefore, how to naturally integrate ideological and political elements into teaching like "a gentle breeze and timely rain," avoiding the phenomenon of "two separate layers," has become a practical challenge for the majority of adult English teachers.

1. Guiding Principles of Adult English Teacher Discourse Under the Ideological and Political Orientation

1.1 The Principle of Individual Relevance

The discourse guidance of teachers should adhere to the principle of individual relevance, closely linking grand ideological and political themes with the concrete personal experiences and lived realities of adult learners. The rich social experience of adult learners serves as the foundation for their cognitive world and also constitutes the optimal anchor point for introducing ideological and political discourse. Teachers should avoid abstract theoretical preaching and instead, through deliberate discourse design, skillfully connect value concepts such as patriotic sentiments, social responsibility, and others with the roles learners play in their family and professional lives, as well as their personal growth experiences. For example, when discussing the spirit of "striving," teachers can guide students to share challenges and breakthroughs from their own career paths. This guiding approach, which personalizes public issues, can effectively stimulate learners' emotional resonance and internal reflection, transforming ideological and political elements from external requirements into personal insights, thereby achieving deeper value identification.

1.2 The Principle of Integrating Utility and Function

Adult English learning possesses a distinct utilitarian and practical orientation. Consequently, teachers' discourse guidance must adhere to the principle of integrating utility and function, clearly demonstrating the value of ideological and political elements in enhancing learners' practical language application skills and comprehensive literacy. Teachers' discourse should focus on elucidating that a profound understanding of social hotspots and cultural phenomena, along with the critical thinking abilities developed on this basis, constitutes a vital component of advanced language proficiency^[1]. For instance, in Business English instruction, discussions on the core value of "integrity" can be integrated with specific scenarios such as trust-building in business negotiations and maintaining brand reputation. Through this approach, ideological and political guidance is no longer an additional burden detached from language learning. Instead, it becomes an effective tool that empowers learners to achieve more efficient and profound cross-cultural communication, thereby aligning with the psychological needs of adult learners who prioritize practical results.

1.3 The Principle of Contextual Integration

The principle of contextual integration requires teachers to seamlessly incorporate the guidance of ideological and political elements into specific contexts of language teaching, making them an organic vehicle for practicing language knowledge and skills, rather than an additional module detached from them. This means teachers' discourse should avoid abrupt transitions or deliberate, forced elevation. Instead, teachers should be adept at transforming ideological and political themes into concrete, actionable classroom tasks and communicative scenarios. For example, the concept of "a community with a shared future for mankind" can be designed as a debate activity simulating an international conference, or the cultivation of "cultural confidence" can be internalized within a writing exercise on how to vividly introduce traditional Chinese crafts in English. Under such contextualized guidance, language learning and value formation occur simultaneously and reinforce each other. The goals of ideological and political education are naturally achieved through the process of authentic language use, thereby avoiding the phenomenon of "two separate layers."

2. Dilemmas and Challenges in Guiding Ideological and Political Discourse in Adult English Teaching

2.1 Potential Conflict Between Ideological-Political Elements and Learning Motivation

Adult learners often have very clear and utilitarian goals for studying English, such as seeking career advancement, passing qualification exams, traveling abroad, or immigrating. They expect to

maximize the improvement of their language application skills within a limited time. If a teacher's discourse presents ideological-political content as a form of "hard integration" detached from the language learning objectives, learners will intuitively perceive it as a "waste" of instructional time and a "deviation" from the learning theme. For instance, in a course focused on teaching business email writing, if the discussion abruptly shifts to a lengthy exposition on the "craftsman spirit" without effectively connecting it to the rigor and professionalism required in email communication, learners will experience a sense of cognitive disconnect, leading to diminished learning enthusiasm.

2.2 The Difficulty in Balancing the Selection of Cultural Content and the Presentation of Discourse

English teaching inherently involves cross-cultural communication, making it fertile ground for conducting ideological and political education. However, how to select and present cultural content poses a significant test for teachers' discursive wisdom^[2]. On the one hand, in order to strengthen cultural confidence, teachers need to guide students to gain a deep understanding of the fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, and to learn to "tell China's stories well" in English. However, if the discursive presentation is overly reliant on grand narratives, lacks vivid details, or merely stays at the superficial level of translating cultural symbols, it can easily become hollow and dull. On the other hand, when conducting comparisons between Chinese and foreign cultures, teachers' discourse must maintain objectivity, dialectical thinking, and inclusiveness. They must avoid falling into the misconception of cultural inferiority while also guarding against the extreme of cultural arrogance.

2.3 Teachers' Own Comprehensive Literacy and Discursive Competence as Internal Constraints

Successful guidance of ideological and political discourse requires teachers to possess not only solid English language proficiency and teaching skills but also profound humanistic literacy, keen contemporary insight, and sophisticated discursive artistry. Many teachers may be able to clearly explain grammatical rules, yet might struggle to organize a profound and enlightening discussion in English on a current social issue. They may lack the curriculum design ability to skillfully integrate ideological and political elements with specific language points, resulting in discourse guidance that remains at the superficial level of "addressing the matter at hand" and fails to reach the level of values. Furthermore, some teachers themselves lack systematic awareness and training in discourse guidance strategies. Their classroom discourse patterns tend to be singular, predominantly consisting of statements and instructions, and lack the exploratory and heuristic discourse capable of stimulating student thinking. This makes it difficult for classroom interactions to achieve depth.

2.4 The Critical Thinking of Adult Learners Presents a Dual Challenge

The adult learner demographic possesses rich life experience and has formed relatively stable worldviews and values. They are accustomed to scrutinizing and evaluating the information they receive. This represents both an advantage and a challenge. The advantage lies in their capacity to engage in higher-level, speculative dialogue. The challenge is that any simplistic, one-sided, or logically unsound ideological-political instruction can be easily detected and resisted by them. Teachers' discourse must withstand scrutiny, offering multiple perspectives and sufficient evidence while respecting learners' right to raise questions and express differing opinions. Attempting to suppress differing voices based on authority or avoiding the multifaceted nature of complex issues will only undermine the teacher's credibility and render the ideological-political guidance entirely ineffective.

3. Core Discourse Guidance Strategies for Adult English Teachers Under the Ideological and Political Orientation

3.1 Constructing Relevance-Oriented Discourse to Achieve Natural Infiltration of Ideological-Political Elements

The key to overcoming the "tacked-on" perception of ideological-political content lies in using teacher discourse to establish a close connection between these elements and the learners' personal experiences, professional needs, and language learning objectives. Teachers should act as "meaning constructors," whose core discursive function is to build bridges^[3]. For example, when teaching

vocabulary related to "environmental protection," teachers should not directly lecture on the grand concept that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets." Instead, they can begin with a relevant question such as: "In your industry, what measures has your company taken to be more environmentally friendly? What challenges did it face?" This question personalizes and contextualizes the macro issue, guiding students to proceed from their own experiences and naturally transition into discussions on deeper issues such as corporate social responsibility and sustainable development^[4]. During the discussion, teachers can appropriately introduce China's environmental policies and achievements, allowing students to perceive national development concepts within the context of solving "practical problems." Such value identification is far more profound and lasting than empty preaching. The essence of relevance-oriented discourse lies in "starting with the students and culminating in values," making ideological-political elements an integral part of solving students' real-world dilemmas and expanding their cognitive horizons^[5].

3.2 Employing Inquiry-Based Discourse to Stimulate Learners' Deep Thinking and Value Identification

When facing adult learners equipped with critical thinking skills, teachers' discourse strategies should shift from "statement" to "inquiry," transforming from knowledge transmitters into catalysts for thinking. Inquiry-based discourse centers on open-ended, thought-provoking questions, aiming to guide students in conducting independent thinking, comparative analysis, and meaning construction, ultimately internalizing these into their own value judgments^[6]. For instance, when studying a text related to technological innovation, teachers can design a series of progressively advancing question chains: "Besides convenience, what are some potential social impacts of the rapid development of AI like ChatGPT?"; "How can we balance technological advancement with ethical considerations?"; "What role should the government, corporations, and individuals play in this process?". These questions have no single correct answer. They encourage students to use English for higher-order thinking activities, deepening their understanding of issues such as technology ethics and social responsibility through the collision of viewpoints. Throughout this process, teachers guide the direction of the discussion through discursive acts such as follow-up questioning, clarification, and summarization. They also appropriately share China's concepts and practices in technology governance, enabling students to form more comprehensive and rational perspectives through active inquiry, thereby achieving higher-level value guidance^[7].

3.3 Implementing Motivational Discourse to Cultivate Intercultural Confidence and a Global Perspective

Motivational discourse plays a crucial role in this process. It refers not only to praising students' linguistic progress but, more importantly, to affirming and respecting the cultural viewpoints and personal insights expressed by the students^[8]. When students attempt to introduce traditional Chinese festivals in English or share their perspectives on a particular social phenomenon, the teacher's feedback should go beyond simple phrases like "Good job" or "Excellent." Instead, it can more specifically highlight the value of their content: "That's a very insightful point. Your explanation of the family values embedded in the Spring Festival really helps us understand its cultural core." Such discourse not only acknowledges the student's linguistic expression but, more importantly, affirms the value of their intellectual content, significantly boosting their confidence in cultural output through English. Simultaneously, the teacher's discourse should guide students to view the world with an open and equitable attitude, encouraging them to use English to understand, analyze, and learn from the outstanding achievements of other cultures. Thus, through the mutual appreciation of "appreciating one's own beauty and the beauty of others," a cultural identity rooted in national heritage yet possessing a global perspective can be constructed^[9].

3.4 Fostering Empathy-Driven Discourse to Build a Harmonious and Mutually Respectful Classroom Community

Discussions at the value level often involve complex and sometimes sensitive topics. A safe, inclusive, and trusting classroom atmosphere is a prerequisite for effective guidance^[10]. Empathy-driven discourse is key to creating such an atmosphere. Teachers need to use their own language to demonstrate understanding and respect for students' diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and emotions. When differing opinions, or even challenges to certain mainstream views, arise in discussion, the teacher's discourse should not be suppressive or dismissive, but rather accepting and guiding: "I

understand why you might see it that way, given your experience. Let's explore another perspective to see if we can get a more complete picture." This type of discourse first validates the student's feelings and stance, lowering their defensive barriers and creating space for subsequent rational dialogue. By using words like "we" instead of "you" or "I," the teacher constructs the image of a "learning community" where teachers and students explore together. In this community, everyone is an equal participant, and the exchange of ideas is bidirectional and mutually beneficial. Within this empathetic atmosphere, students are more willing to open up and engage in sincere dialogue. Consequently, ideological and political guidance can reach the depths of people's hearts through warm and harmonious interaction^[11].

4. Conclusion

The four-in-one strategic framework proposed in this paper—constructing relevance-oriented discourse, employing inquiry-based discourse, implementing motivational discourse, and fostering empathy-driven discourse—aims to address the core challenges in current practice. These strategies collectively point to a central tenet: genuine ideological and political education is not an additional task external to language teaching, but an inherent requirement of high-quality instructional activity. It requires teachers to use discourse to transform grand value pursuits into issues relevant to learners, convert unidirectional value indoctrination into bidirectional intellectual exploration, integrate the cultivation of cultural confidence into every affirming piece of feedback, and build harmonious teacher-student relationships within every empathetic exchange. Admittedly, the effective implementation of these discourse strategies places unprecedented high demands on the comprehensive literacy of adult English teachers. This necessitates teachers to continuously strengthen their own theoretical study of political theory and their reservoir of humanities and social sciences knowledge, enhance their critical thinking and cross-cultural communication skills, and consistently reflect on and refine their discursive artistry in teaching practice. Future teacher training and professional development should place greater emphasis on cultivating discourse guidance capabilities. Ultimately, when the seeds of ideological and political education take root and sprout quietly in the hearts and minds of adult learners through the teacher's wise and warm discourse, adult English education truly achieves the perfect integration of its instrumental and humanistic dimensions, thereby contributing indispensable strength to cultivating a new generation capable of undertaking the mission of national rejuvenation.

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