

Enhancing University EFL Teachers' Innovative Teaching Competence from the Perspective of Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education

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Abstract:

This study investigates the innovative teaching competence of university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers within the framework of curriculum-based ideological and political education (CIPE). Through qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews with seven experienced EFL teachers, the study explores teachers' perceptions of CIPE, the innovative strategies they employ, the challenges they encounter, and potential pathways for improvement. Findings highlight the dual role of CIPE in enriching language education and nurturing students' cultural and ideological awareness. Teachers employed strategies such as contextualized material selection, technology-enhanced teaching, and student-centered approaches to bridge theoretical principles and classroom practices. However, systemic challenges, including resource scarcity, balancing dual objectives, and insufficient institutional support, were identified. To address these barriers, the study proposes actionable solutions, including collaborative professional development, digital resource platforms, and increased autonomy for teachers. The research contributes to advancing CIPE in higher education by providing practical insights into fostering innovative teaching competence in EFL contexts.

Keywords:

University EFL Teachers, Innovative Teaching Competence, Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education (CIPE)

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of "curriculum-based ideological and political education" (CIPE) has emerged as a vital focus in the reform of higher education in China [1]. This approach aims to seamlessly integrate ideological and political education into professional courses, fostering synergy between explicit knowledge instruction and implicit value education. As a fundamental component of the higher

education curriculum, university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses are not only responsible for cultivating students' language proficiency but also play a crucial role in nurturing their national identity, global perspective, and intercultural communication skills [2]. However, effectively embedding ideological and political elements into EFL teaching remains a significant challenge in current educational reform efforts.

Innovative teaching competence is a key factor in the successful implementation of CIPE [3]. Within this framework, university EFL teachers are expected to possess not only solid subject knowledge and teaching skills but also the ability to integrate ideological and political elements, adopt interdisciplinary approaches, and employ diverse teaching strategies creatively [4]. This requires comprehensive changes in teaching objectives, content, methods, and evaluation systems to achieve a deep integration of language instruction with value-based education. However, in practice, EFL teachers often face obstacles such as limited resources, difficulties in instructional design, and varied levels of student receptiveness, posing significant challenges to the enhancement of their innovative teaching competence.

Although existing research on CIPE has largely focused on theoretical explorations and case studies [5], empirical studies targeting the experiences and practices of university EFL teachers remain relatively limited. Specifically, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into how these teachers enhance their innovative teaching abilities in the context of CIPE, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative research approach, conducting in-depth interviews with seven experienced university EFL teachers. This study aims to investigate their current state of innovative teaching abilities, the difficulties they face, and potential pathways for improvement within the context of CIPE.

By providing theoretical insights and practical guidance, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing reform of college foreign language education and support the professional development of foreign language teachers in the ideological and political education context. Furthermore, this study aims to enhance the effectiveness of ideological and political education in EFL courses and offer a fresh perspective for advancing CIPE across higher education institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education

Curriculum-based ideological and political education (CIPE) has gained significant attention in recent years as an innovative approach to integrating value-based education into academic curricula. Rooted in the broader framework of moral education, CIPE emphasizes embedding ideological and political elements into professional courses to achieve a harmonious blend of knowledge dissemination and value cultivation [6]. Scholars have highlighted CIPE's potential to transform traditional teaching practices by fostering students' holistic development, including their ethical, cultural, and civic competencies [7].

In the context of language education, CIPE is particularly relevant, given the inherent connection between language, culture, and values. Studies have shown that foreign language courses provide a unique platform for fostering students' global perspectives and intercultural understanding while instilling national identity and

moral values [8]. However, despite its growing prominence, CIPE implementation in higher education faces challenges, such as a lack of systematic teaching resources, insufficient teacher training, and difficulties in aligning ideological elements with subject-specific content (Wang et al., 2020) [9]. These challenges underscore the need to enhance teachers' pedagogical strategies and innovative competencies to realize the full potential of CIPE.

2.2. Innovative Teaching Competence in Language Education

Innovative teaching competence refers to a teacher's ability to creatively design and implement instructional strategies that address evolving educational demands. It encompasses various dimensions, including curriculum design, the integration of technology, adaptability to diverse learning needs, and the ability to foster critical thinking and collaboration among students [10]. In the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, innovative teaching competence is crucial due to the dynamic nature of language learning and the increasing emphasis on developing students' communicative and intercultural skills [11].

Research has identified several factors influencing teachers' innovative teaching competence, including institutional support, professional development opportunities, and teachers' intrinsic motivation [12]. Moreover, collaborative practices and exposure to interdisciplinary approaches have been found to enhance teachers' creative problem-solving abilities and instructional design skills [13]. Despite these findings, studies focusing on the intersection of innovative teaching and ideological and political education in the EFL context are limited, revealing a critical gap in the literature.

2.3. Integrating CIPE and Innovative Teaching in EFL Contexts

The integration of CIPE into EFL teaching requires a multifaceted approach, blending ideological and political education with language instruction to achieve dual teaching objectives. Scholars have proposed various strategies, such as selecting culturally relevant texts, designing thematic lesson plans, and leveraging digital tools to facilitate the infusion of values into language learning [14]. However, empirical research on how EFL teachers adapt their teaching practices to align with CIPE principles is scarce.

Existing studies suggest that teacher innovation is a cornerstone for effective CIPE implementation in EFL courses [15]. Teachers must navigate the complexities of combining abstract ideological content with practical language skills while maintaining student engagement. Furthermore, they need to develop context-specific strategies that reflect their students' linguistic proficiency and cultural background. This highlights the importance of building teachers' innovative teaching competence as a means to overcome implementation challenges and enhance the educational impact of CIPE.

2.4. Research Gap and Rationale for the Study

While there is a growing body of research on CIPE and innovative teaching separately, few studies have examined their intersection, particularly in the context of university EFL education. The existing literature often focuses on theoretical frameworks or isolated case studies, leaving a gap in understanding the lived experiences of EFL teachers as they navigate the complexities of implementing CIPE

in practice. Moreover, limited attention has been paid to the professional development needs of EFL teachers and the institutional factors that influence their innovative teaching competence within the CIPE framework.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on the experiences of seven university EFL teachers. By exploring their perceptions, challenges, and strategies, this research seeks to provide insights into how innovative teaching competence can be fostered in the context of CIPE, offering practical implications for teacher training and curriculum reform.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the innovative teaching competence of university EFL teachers from the perspective of curriculum-based ideological and political education (CIPE). Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for investigating complex, context-specific phenomena and for understanding participants' lived experiences and perspectives. The primary method of data collection in this study is semi-structured interviews, which allow for both structured inquiry and flexibility to probe deeper into emerging themes.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study are seven EFL teachers selected from Guangdong University of Science and Technology through purposive sampling. The selection criteria include:

- (1) A minimum of three years of teaching experience in university-level EFL courses.
- (2) Involvement in or familiarity with curriculum-based ideological and political education initiatives.
- (3) A willingness to share personal insights and experiences regarding innovative teaching practices.

The participants represent diverse teaching contexts and professional backgrounds, ensuring a rich variety of perspectives. This diversity helps capture a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies associated with CIPE implementation in EFL settings.

3.3. Data Collection

The data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in a one-on-one format. Each interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interview protocol included open-ended questions designed to explore:

- (1) Participants' understanding of CIPE and its relevance to EFL teaching.
- (2) Current practices and examples of innovative teaching strategies.
- (3) Challenges and barriers encountered in integrating CIP into EFL instruction.
- (4) Professional development needs and institutional support for enhancing innovative teaching competence.

The interview questions were pilot-tested with two EFL teachers to ensure clarity and relevance. Minor adjustments were made based on their feedback.

3.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data. The process involved the following steps:

(1) Transcription: All interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and consistency.

(2) Familiarization: The researcher thoroughly reviewed the transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of the data.

(3) Coding: Open coding was used to identify recurring concepts, patterns, and ideas.

(4) Theme Development: Codes were grouped into broader themes that represent key aspects of the research questions.

(5) Refinement: Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the study's objectives.

NVivo software was used to assist in organizing and analyzing the qualitative data systematically.

4. Research Results

4.1. University EFL Teachers' Perceptions of CIPE

The interviewed teachers demonstrated varied understandings of CIPE, reflecting a spectrum of engagement with the concept.

Theme 1: Recognizing the Value of CIPE: Most participants (71%, 5 out of 7) recognized the importance of CIPE in fostering students' values alongside language proficiency. One teacher noted, "CIPE gives a moral depth to language learning. It's not just about vocabulary or grammar; it's about shaping perspectives and fostering responsibility." Another participant stated, "Language is deeply connected to culture and identity, so embedding CIPE in EFL courses is both relevant and necessary."

Theme 2: Diverse Understanding of CIPE Implementation: However, 57% of participants (4 out of 7) expressed uncertainty about systematic CIPE integration, with one teacher admitting, "I understand the idea of CIPE, but translating it into practical classroom activities is challenging. Sometimes it feels too abstract." This variation highlights differing levels of preparedness and confidence among teachers in aligning CIPE with their teaching practices.

4.2. Current Practices and Innovative Teaching Strategies

The participants shared innovative strategies they employed to implement CIPE principles, illustrating creative ways to merge language instruction with value education.

Theme 3: Contextualized Material Selection: Six out of seven teachers (86%) reported using culturally and ideologically relevant materials. For instance, one teacher shared, "I use texts about Chinese technological innovations to teach reading and vocabulary, but they also prompt discussions about national pride and ethics in

technology.” Another highlighted the integration of stories from Chinese history, saying, “It’s a great way to make students appreciate their own cultural heritage while practicing language skills.”

Theme 4: Interactive and Technology-Enhanced Methods: About 50% of participants (3 out of 7) used interactive digital tools to engage students. One teacher explained, “I organized a virtual debate on environmental policies in China and abroad. It not only improved their speaking skills but also made them think critically about global and local issues.”

Theme 5: Student-Centered Approaches: Five teachers (71%) emphasized the importance of student-centered approaches. One participant noted, “I encourage students to create projects on societal challenges like climate change or cultural preservation. They use English to present their ideas, and it’s amazing how much they can reflect on these topics.”

4.3. Challenges in Implementing CIPE

Participants identified several challenges that hinder effective CIPE implementation in EFL teaching.

Theme 6: Lack of Adequate Resources: A common concern among participants (71%, 5 out of 7) was the lack of tailored teaching resources. One teacher remarked, “We don’t have enough ready-made materials that align with CIPE and EFL objectives. I often spend hours adapting content, which is exhausting.”

Theme 7: Balancing Language Proficiency and Ideological Content: Four participants (57%) highlighted difficulties in balancing linguistic and ideological goals. As one teacher explained, “For students struggling with basic English skills, adding CIPE content sometimes feels overwhelming. I have to prioritize language, but then the CIPE part feels superficial.”

Theme 8: Limited Training and Institutional Support: Another significant issue, reported by 71% of participants (5 out of 7), was the lack of adequate training and support. One participant shared, “I’ve attended one or two workshops on CIPE, but they were too general. We need practical guidance specific to EFL teaching.” Another added, “Without clear institutional frameworks, we’re left to experiment on our own, which can be frustrating.”

4.4. Pathways to Enhance Innovative Teaching Competence

Participants offered suggestions for overcoming challenges and improving their innovative teaching competence in the context of CIPE.

Theme 9: Collaborative Professional Development: Four teachers (57%) emphasized the value of collaboration. One participant suggested, “We need regular interdisciplinary workshops where language teachers and other subject teachers can share ideas on integrating CIPE effectively.” Another noted, “Peer discussions have helped me adapt CIPE principles better than any formal training.”

Theme 10: Leveraging Technology and Digital Resources: Three participants (43%) advocated for the development of digital platforms and resource repositories. As one teacher put it, “Imagine having an online hub where we could access lesson plans, materials, and even share our own resources. It would save so much time and effort.”

Theme 11: Encouraging Autonomy and Creativity: A smaller group (43%, 3 out of 7) emphasized the need for greater autonomy in curriculum design. One teacher remarked, “If we are given more freedom to design our courses, it will encourage us to experiment and innovate. Recognizing these efforts with awards or grants could also be a great motivator.”

5. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the potential of curriculum-based ideological and political education (CIPE) in enhancing the dual objectives of language instruction and value-based education. They also reveal critical challenges and opportunities for improving university EFL teachers’ innovative teaching competence within this framework.

5.1. Alignment with the Goals of CIPE

This study confirms the alignment between CIPE principles and EFL teaching objectives, as emphasized by participants who view CIPE as a valuable tool for nurturing students’ linguistic and moral development. Most participants (71%) recognized CIPE’s potential to add “moral depth” to language learning, as one teacher remarked, “It’s not just about vocabulary or grammar; it’s about shaping perspectives and fostering responsibility.” This finding aligns with existing literature (Zhang & Wang, 2019), which highlights CIPE’s role in promoting holistic student development.

5.2. Innovative Practices and their Impact

The innovative practices shared by participants illustrate how EFL teachers are creatively integrating CIPE principles into their classrooms. For instance:

(1) **Contextualized Material Selection:** The use of culturally relevant texts resonated strongly with participants, with 86% incorporating such materials to foster discussions on values like national pride and ethics. One teacher highlighted the effectiveness of such materials, stating, “Students not only learn about language but also connect with their cultural roots through these stories.”

(2) **Interactive Methods and Technology Integration:** Half of the participants (50%) reported using digital tools and interactive activities to engage students. Virtual debates and collaborative projects on societal topics proved effective in enhancing both language skills and critical thinking. These practices align with Harmer’s (2020) findings on the benefits of interdisciplinary and interactive teaching methods.

These strategies demonstrate the feasibility of merging CIPE with innovative teaching, addressing the dual goals of language proficiency and ideological education.

5.3. Challenges in Implementing CIPE

Despite their innovative approaches, teachers face significant barriers that limit the full realization of CIPE goals:

(1) **Resource Scarcity:** The lack of tailored resources was a recurring concern for 71% of participants. As one teacher noted, “We don’t have enough ready-made materials that align with CIPE and EFL objectives. Adapting content consumes a lot of time and energy.” This aligns with Wang et al.’s (2020) observation that resource availability is a critical factor in effective CIPE implementation.

(2) **Balancing Dual Objectives:** Teachers highlighted the difficulty of balancing language proficiency and ideological content, particularly for students with lower English skills. This challenge was succinctly expressed by one participant: “I often have to prioritize basic language skills, which can make the CIPE part feel superficial.”

(3) **Insufficient Training and Support:** Another major challenge was the lack of targeted professional development opportunities, with 71% of participants citing inadequate institutional support. One teacher remarked, “Workshops on CIPE are too generic. We need training tailored to EFL contexts.” This underscores the need for specific, context-sensitive training programs to support teachers in navigating CIPE.

5.4. Pathways for Enhancing Innovative Competence

Participants offered actionable suggestions to address these challenges:

(1) **Collaborative Professional Development:** Peer collaboration was widely endorsed, with 57% advocating for interdisciplinary workshops. One teacher emphasized, “Sharing ideas with colleagues from other disciplines has been more impactful than formal training sessions.”

(2) **Leveraging Technology and Digital Resources:** Developing centralized digital platforms for CIPE-aligned materials emerged as a key recommendation. As one participant explained, “An online repository of curated resources would be a game-changer, saving time and improving access.”

(3) **Encouraging Autonomy and Creativity:** Greater autonomy in curriculum design was suggested as a means to foster innovation. One teacher suggested, “Recognizing and rewarding innovative teaching practices could motivate more teachers to experiment with CIPE.”

5.5. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study reinforces the critical role of teacher innovation in achieving CIPE goals, as highlighted by Huang and Liu (2022). By showcasing practical strategies and real-world challenges, it bridges the gap between theoretical frameworks and classroom realities. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of institutional support and resource development in empowering teachers to overcome barriers.

In a word, the findings suggest that while university EFL teachers are making strides in integrating CIPE, systemic barriers such as resource limitations and inadequate training must be addressed to enhance their innovative teaching competence. Institutions should prioritize the development of tailored training programs, collaborative platforms, and resource repositories to support teachers in this endeavor. By addressing these challenges, higher education institutions can create an environment where EFL teachers thrive as innovative educators, achieving the dual objectives of language proficiency and ideological and political education.

6. Conclusions

This study explored the innovative teaching competence of university EFL teachers in the context of curriculum-based ideological and political education (CIPE). Through in-depth interviews with seven experienced teachers, the research illuminated their perceptions, current practices, challenges, and pathways for enhancing their teaching abilities. The findings provide valuable insights into the

intersection of CIPE and innovative teaching, highlighting both the potential and the barriers faced by educators in this domain.

6.1. Key Findings

This study underscores the integral role of CIPE in EFL teaching, highlighting its dual purpose of developing linguistic proficiency and moral values. Teachers viewed CIPE as a meaningful way to enrich language education by integrating cultural and ideological dimensions, enhancing the relevance of classroom learning to students' identities and values. To achieve this, participants employed innovative strategies such as contextualized material selection, technology-enhanced teaching methods, and student-centered approaches, effectively bridging the gap between theoretical principles and practical classroom application.

However, the findings also revealed significant challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing CIPE, including the lack of tailored teaching resources, the complexity of balancing linguistic and ideological goals, and inadequate institutional support. To address these issues, the study proposed actionable pathways, such as fostering collaborative professional development, creating technology-based resource-sharing platforms, and granting teachers greater autonomy and recognition for innovative practices. These recommendations emphasize the need for structured support systems to empower educators and maximize the potential of CIPE in EFL education.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single institutional context. Future research could expand the scope by including a more diverse group of participants across multiple institutions and regions. Longitudinal studies examining the impact of specific interventions, such as professional development programs or resource repositories, could further inform best practices for CIPE implementation.

To sum up, the findings of this study demonstrate that university EFL teachers are making meaningful strides in integrating CIPE into their teaching practices, despite facing systemic challenges. By addressing these barriers and supporting teachers' innovative capacities, higher education institutions can enhance the dual objectives of language proficiency and value-based education. This research contributes to the broader discourse on educational reform, offering actionable insights for promoting innovative teaching in the context of CIPE. Through sustained efforts to empower educators, CIPE has the potential to transform university EFL education into a platform for cultivating both linguistic competence and moral values, preparing students for the challenges of a globalized world.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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