

# An Empirical Study on Foreign Language Majors' Needs for Ideological and Political Education Elements in Chinese Universities\*

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The paper takes 2076 undergraduate students majoring in foreign languages from 15 Chinese universities as the research subjects to investigate their demand for ideological and political education elements in foreign language courses. The results show that: (1) Students have high needs for ideological and political education elements in foreign language courses; (2) There are differences in students' needs for ideological and political education elements across different dimensions. Students have higher demand for dimensions such as personal qualities, cultural literacy, moral cultivation, and patriotism, while their demand for dimensions related to constitutional law and political identity is relatively low. Therefore, foreign language majors in Chinese universities should optimize the supply of ideological and political education elements in their courses according to students' needs, and improve the effectiveness of moral education in these courses.

*Keywords:* foreign language major, ideological and political education elements, needs analysis

## I. Introduction

At the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities, General Secretary Xi Jinping (2016) emphasized, "Ideological and political work must be integrated throughout the entire process of education and teaching to achieve all-round and whole-process education," and "other courses should all maintain their respective domains and plant well their 'field of responsibility', so that all types of courses move in the same direction as ideological and political theory courses, creating a synergetic effect." Given the special "foreign-related" nature of the training targets and content of foreign language majors in universities, it is of utmost importance to guide students in adhering to the Chinese stance and firmly establishing the "Four Self-Confidences" while learning multiculturalism. The key to achieving this goal lies in strengthening the ideological and political education within foreign language courses, thereby unifying knowledge impartation,

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capability cultivation, and value guidance. Analyzing student needs is fundamental to conducting ideological and political education within foreign language courses and holds significant practical implications.

Currently, research on ideological and political education within foreign language courses is primarily conducted at a macro level. Firstly, the essence of ideological and political education within foreign language courses. As an educational concept, ideological and political education must integrate the characteristics of foreign language disciplines to construct a scientific and rational teaching system, integrating it into the entire process of classroom teaching (Xiao & Huang, 2020, pp. 1+10-14; Huang & Xiao, 2021, pp. 1+10-16). Secondly, textbook development based on the concept of ideological and political education within courses. Foreign language textbooks should be centered on student development, with a focus on creating a series of textbooks with high academic value, distinct characteristics of the times, and prominent ideological and political elements, seamlessly integrating ideological and political elements into material selection, activity design, and effect evaluation (Sun, 2020, pp. 46-51; Xu, 2021, pp. 18-24; Luo, 2021, pp. 60-64). Thirdly, enhancing teachers' ideological and political competency within courses. On the one hand, as the executors of ideological and political education within courses, teachers should improve their personal ideological and political literacy (Chen, 2020, pp. 12-16), possess the ability to impart multicultural knowledge correctly and seize the right timing for ideological and political education (Hong, 2020, pp. 23-26+31), and adjust teaching methods, pedagogies, and assessment approaches (Chang & Li, 2020, pp. 17-22; Chen, 2021, pp. 70-73). On the other hand, universities should also prioritize ideological and political theoretical training for foreign language teachers (Xiao, 2020, pp. 42-43), emphasizing the leading and exemplary role of outstanding teachers (Jiang, 2020, pp. 18-21+3).

Existing research provides a solid theoretical foundation for this study. However, most current research on ideological and political education within courses focuses on theoretical exploration at a macro level, employing superficial reasoning and empirical summaries as research methods, lacking systematic evidence-based research. Based on the needs analysis theory, this paper aims to answer the following questions through a questionnaire survey: What are the current needs of foreign language majors for ideological and political elements within courses? The paper provides avenues for universities to enhance the effectiveness of ideological and political education within foreign language courses, cultivate complex talents with both patriotic sentiments and international perspectives.

## **II. Research Design**

### **Questionnaire Design**

This study refers to the needs analysis model proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987, pp. 53-63) and designs the survey questionnaire from two dimensions: (1) personal basic information of the research subjects, such as gender, major, grade, and school; (2) analysis of students' target situations, which mainly refers to their needs for ideological and political (I&P) elements in foreign language professional courses. In terms of I&P elements, the questionnaire is designed around political identity, patriotism, cultural literacy, constitutional and legal awareness, moral cultivation, personal quality, and other aspects, based on the "Guiding Outline for the Construction of Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities" and with reference to the research conducted by Zhao Wen et al. (2022, pp. 12-19). The questionnaire comprises 21 items, including Likert 5-point scale questions and multiple-choice questions.

### Research Subjects and Data Collection

The research subjects of this paper are 2,076 undergraduate students majoring in foreign languages from 15 universities located in eastern, central, and western China, covering majors such as English, Business English, Business English (Cross-border E-commerce), Russian, Japanese, and Translation. The universities where the research subjects are enrolled include: one general undergraduate college in Zhejiang Province; nine undergraduate colleges in Shandong Province, encompassing agriculture and forestry, teacher training, medical, and comprehensive universities; one general undergraduate college in Hebei Province; one national “Double First-Class” university in Guangdong Province; three general undergraduate colleges in Shaanxi Province, including one specialized in foreign languages; and one teacher training undergraduate college in Guizhou Province.

The survey questionnaire was distributed through Wenjuanxing, and a total of 2,076 questionnaires were collected. After eliminating 62 invalid questionnaires, 2,014 valid questionnaires were finally retrieved, with a recovery rate of 97.01%.

### III. Research Results and Discussion

The overall demand for ideological and political (I&P) elements in courses for foreign language majors is favorable. Based on the “Guiding Outline for the Construction of Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities,” a survey was conducted to investigate students’ needs for I&P elements across six dimensions within their foreign language professional courses: political identity, patriotic sentiment, cultural literacy, constitutional and legal awareness, moral cultivation, and personal qualities.

Students have a high level of demand for the six dimensions of ideological and political elements in foreign language courses, with demand values for each dimension exceeding 4.60. The overall average demand for these elements is 4.76, representing a high level, and the standard deviation is 0.53, suggesting that the dispersion of student demand is relatively small. However, there are notable differences in the demand for elements across different dimensions. Specifically, ranked from highest to lowest based on the average demand, the dimensions are personal qualities (mean value of 4.83), cultural literacy (mean value of 4.80), moral cultivation (mean value of 4.80), patriotic sentiment (mean value of 4.79), constitutional and legal awareness (mean value of 4.70), and political identity (mean value of 4.66). Among these, the demand for “personal qualities” is the highest, while the demand for “political identity” is slightly lower than the other dimensions. In terms of dispersion, the highest degree of dispersion is observed for “political identity,” followed by “constitutional and legal awareness,” indicating significant variations in student demand for these two dimensions. For the other dimensions, the dispersion of demand is relatively small.

The differences in students’ demand for I&P elements across various dimensions in foreign language courses reflect the characteristics of contemporary college students. On the one hand, as the times evolve, the distinct traits and individual needs of contemporary young college students have become more pronounced. Strengthened independent and self-awareness, individualized thought and behavior, diversified learning motivations, and pragmatic value orientations (Li, 2021, pp. 74-89) have led students to pay more attention to personal development, hence the strongest demand for the “personal qualities” dimension among I&P elements in courses. On the other hand, profound changes have occurred in both international and domestic situations in

the 21st century. Economic globalization has enriched the political landscape, accompanied by diversification of international perspectives and ideologies. The virtualization and de-authorization brought about by the internet, as well as the overemphasis on efficiency and instrumental rationality brought about by technological advancements, have had profound impacts on the ideological growth and value judgments of contemporary college students (Zhang, 2018, pp. 153-156). Young students' political identity faces a tendency to weaken (Cui & Zhang, 2018, pp. 17-20). Due to the specificity of foreign language majors, students have more opportunities to encounter diverse foreign ideologies and cultures, making their mainstream values more vulnerable to the impact of pluralistic values. Therefore, for foreign language teachers, it is particularly important to help students shape correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values through I&P courses and strengthen their political identity (Xiao & Huang, 2020, pp. 1+10-14).

Students have a strong demand for I&P elements related to patriotic sentiment, moral cultivation, and cultural literacy. Among the 32 secondary dimensions under the six major dimensions of I&P elements, 21 secondary dimensions have a selection ratio exceeding 80%, with 9 of them exceeding 90%. These include "excellent traditional Chinese culture," "socialist core values," "Chinese cultural confidence," "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," "international perspective," "worldview, outlook on life, and values," "professional ethics," "career aspirations," and "the Chinese Dream." These I&P elements are largely consistent with the "quality requirements" educational objectives outlined in the foreign language professional teaching guidelines and national standards for teaching quality, indicating that student demand aligns with the training objectives of foreign language majors. Overall, the demand for secondary dimension indicators in the three dimensions of patriotic sentiment, moral cultivation, and cultural literacy is relatively high. The demand for the constitutional and legal dimension is relatively low, possibly because students perceive a weaker relevance between constitutional and legal issues and foreign language majors. Among the secondary indicators of the moral cultivation dimension, "academic ethics" and "academic norms" have lower demand, which can be attributed to the fact that most undergraduate students rarely engage in academic publishing and lack sufficient awareness of the importance of academic ethics and norms, thus resulting in lower demand for these elements.

#### **IV. Conclusions and Implications**

This study, through an online survey, investigated the demand for I&P elements in six dimensions—"political identity, patriotic sentiment, cultural literacy, constitutional and legal awareness, moral cultivation, and personal qualities"—among 2014 foreign language majors. The results indicate that students have a generally high demand for I&P elements in foreign language courses. The conclusions of this study offer several insights into the construction of I&P in foreign language courses.

First, foreign language majors should strengthen I&P education in their curricula. Students in these majors have a high degree of acceptance and recognition of I&P education, with a clear understanding and strong desire to improve their ideological and political literacy, thereby enhancing their overall quality. Strengthening I&P education in foreign language courses is not only a historical mission to cultivate talents for the Party and the country but also a practical choice to address students' concerns and meet their self-development requirements.

Second, the supply of I&P elements in the curriculum should be optimized. First, students' political identity need to be enhanced. Political identity education is the essence and core of I&P education and is essential to fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. Second, I&P materials should be tailored to enrich and enhance students' personal qualities and abilities based on their unique characteristics. Third, universities can integrate traditional Chinese culture into the I&P teaching system of foreign language courses. Traditional Chinese culture can help contemporary college students better understand Chinese civilization and excellent historical resources, thereby enhancing their cultural literacy, fostering patriotic sentiment, and establishing correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. For foreign language majors to fulfill the historical mission of "standing on China's reality, telling China's stories well, and spreading China's voice," understanding China's outstanding traditional culture is a prerequisite and foundation.

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