

The Moral Education Design in Foreign Language Major Courses

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Keywords: Moral Education, Foreign Language Major Courses, Teaching Design, Objective-Based Education

Abstract: In today's China, there is a national trend of advancing moral education among universities, especially regarding moral education in courses. However, foreign language major courses have yet developed any sophisticated pattern of moral education design, due to the limitation of their specialized and incisive teaching content, leading to the urgent demand of theoretical studies and practical research. This paper therefore discusses how to incorporate moral education elements with specialized course content under the guidance of Objective-Based Education, illustrated by the example of Advanced Business English I, a core course for Business English major. The incorporative process is demonstrated by the design for one class session. The experience and inspiration could be valuable to the moral education design of other foreign language major courses.

1. The Background of Business English Courses

China is currently undergoing a major transition period while the international environment is also changing profoundly. With the rapid change of situations, there is an urgent need for advancing moral education in Chinese universities. Since 2016, the colleges and universities nationwide have responded actively to the important statement of “persist in taking moral education and cultivating people as the central step” “of education and teaching” given by General Secretary Xi Jinping, by setting up moral education courses and organizing moral education activities as well as providing relevant training sessions for the teaching faculties [3].

Many researchers have started their experiments on moral education teaching design. In law courses, for instance, Deng (2022) highlights the significance of finding the connecting points for the teaching content of “Tax Law” and moral education design[2]; Yang, Lei, and Zhang (2022) also recognize the importance of the close integration of course content in “China Tax System”[14]. Regarding the teaching design, Wu (2020) carefully constructed a series of teaching modules to arouse students' interests by verifying the teaching elements[12]. In terms of the fundamental

driving force in the construction of moral education in courses, Xu (2021) emphasizes the importance of teacher and the significance of improving teachers' level [13]. Ren (2021) shares similar opinion[8], explaining in detail the significance of improving teaching's awareness and their ability of conducting moral education. In addition to the perspectives of curriculum and teachers, some also underline the importance of tools. Ma (2021) points out the value of a "high-quality cultural carrier" and the power of publicity media during moral teaching beyond the design of content itself [7]. Internet technologies are also helpful to the moral teaching process, especially the application of big data and cloud computing technology; therefore, the teachers should be able to utilize all the available technologies for the ideal learning outcomes [6].

The design for moral education is becoming a major trend, pushing forward the reform and development of higher education, especially regarding the teaching of courses. Wenzhou City University, for instance, promotes the concepts of moral education that guides the design of curriculum and the teaching process of all courses [1]. However, problems exist in practice. Zhu & Tao (2021) point out the issues of the separation of the content of education and reality and the unsophisticated teacher evaluation mechanism. Challenges in three aspects are yet to be resolved: from the theoretical aspect, there has not yet been a sophisticated moral education theoretical framework; from the curricular aspect, there has not been a well-established curriculum with moral education elements; from the coordination aspect, there has not been an inter-connected mechanism that integrates moral education in courses and moral education courses as well as basic moral education teaching [5]. In particular, how to conduct effective moral education design for foreign language major courses remains an urgent but unsolved question. Practices are highly demanded for the exploration of incorporating moral education elements into the teaching content.

2. The Practice of Moral education in Foreign Language Major Courses

Foreign language course in universities include general foreign language courses and foreign language major courses. At present, most Chinese educators are focusing on the theoretical discussion of practice of moral education in general foreign language courses, which in nature have simpler teaching content than major courses. Yet, some scholars have also explored the practice of moral education in English courses in vocational schools. According to Tian (2021), besides the design for class, efforts should be made in the programs that connects classes and social practice, which may contribute to students' practice of moral education values [10]. The practice of moral education reform in English major courses in universities also adopts the same idea. Shen (2021) attaches high importance to the combination of learning and application in the design of English major courses, connecting western and Chinese cultures, which has achieved positive results[9].

Wen (2021) put forward a two-dimensional descriptive moral education framework for foreign language courses[11], including the vertical dimension (moral education range – main tasks – key strategy) and the horizontal dimension (content – management – evaluation – teachers' input); as an moral education system for foreign language courses can be established from these two dimensions, the focus of the course should still be foreign language teaching content but the priority task of design should be exploring moral education elements and refining teaching designs accordingly while the key strategy should be achieving the effects of being imperceptibly influential. For general foreign language courses, the "management" and "evaluation" can be problematic, due to their larger class size. In comparison, foreign language major courses have to deal with the overwhelming difficulties in the "content" dimension of moral education design, as a result of the highly specialized teaching content. to be specific, moral education elements should be merged into the specialized content seamlessly, which requires incisive analysis of the specialized knowledge and elaborate design.

3. Case Study: Advanced Business English I

3.1. An Introduction to the Course

Advanced Business English I is a core major course offered by the Business English Department in Chengdu Neusoft University. The course adopts An Integrated Course of Advanced Business English I as the textbook, aiming at the third-year students of Business English major. While the course combines the learning of basic Business English knowledge and skills with practices and program training, the overall teaching objectives highlight the fundamental English skills as well as the abilities of critical and logical thinking and business practicing in an English setting.

The teaching objectives can be classified into three categories, knowledge, skills, and quality (or moral education). Among them, the moral education objectives contain primarily the learning attitude and pattern, which requires the formation of an effective learning habit and a correct learning attitude for each student; followed by the cultivation of values, which aims at establishing the positive view of self-value and a reasonable career goal, as well as the education of the national spirits and spirits of the time, especially patriotism and the spirits of reformation and innovation.

3.2. The General Teaching Design

Seeking the realization of each teaching objective, this course follows the guidance of the concept of Outcome-Based Education (OBE). As Jiang (2003) mentions, Outcome-Based Education regards learners as the center of all teaching processes and requires the designing of schools and their curricula in such a way that ensures students obtain all the knowledge[4], skills, and qualities needed for educational success and achieve all the intended outcomes. Therefore, Advanced Business English I conducted its teaching design based on the intended final learning outcomes, adopting the discussion learning method, question-based method, and the cooperative learning method as the basis, with lecturing method and practice method as supplements, intending to stimulate students' participation and encourage self-learning[15].

As the course involves an extensive background of western and Chinese history and humanities and covers modern Business cases, there are certain possible places to incorporate moral education elements, especially in topic lead-in, background research, and passage instruction. There are five major bonding points, as shown in Table 1.

The bonding points above are the integral components of the course, which guarantees the feasibility of incorporating moral education elements into the original teaching design without losing its completeness. As to the using of teaching methods for the incorporation, the previously mentioned methods are all adoptable. As Table 2 demonstrates, each method deals with moral education elements slightly differently.

Among the five teaching methods, question-based teaching is the foundation, guiding the entire teaching process; discussion-based teaching and cooperative learning work as the focus of moral education teaching, whereas practicing only serves as a supplement and lecturing as the critical guidance. The methods together arise student's learning interests while encourages their positive thinking and practice, which further leads to the establishment of a positive view of life and world. Such a combination is not only beneficial to the integration of moral education elements but also conducive to students' comprehension of required knowledge, mastery of required skills, and improvement of relevant qualities.

Table 1. The five bonding points

Bonding Point	Details
Understanding western history and humanities	As each unit of this course discusses the historical and humanities background of the western civilization, it is intrinsically significant to review the development of the West from a critical perspective.
Understanding market economy from a critical perspective	All the major economies worldwide are closely connected with each other in today's international market; it is therefore crucial to learn the nature of market and commodity and understand capitalism as well as the relationship between equality and efficiency.
Understanding the features of the time and trend of social development	Certain units of this course, such as Unit 1 Globalization and Unit 5 Creativity and Innovation, analyze the theme of the time and world development. The tendency of globalization and informatization and the significance of innovation should be covered in detail.
Establishing the awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship	Unit 4 Information Technology and Unit 5 Creativity and Innovation both involve multiple questions about innovation and entrepreneurship as well as enterprise development. Students should be guided and encouraged for creativity.
Cultivating patriotism and advocating socialism	During the learning process, student should be encouraged to analyze and comprehend the essential spirits of the Chinese nationality through comparisons between the backgrounds of each country and understand the distinct advantages of a socialist system.

Table 2. Moral education teaching and learning methods

Learning Method	Detailed Instructions for Moral Education Teaching
Lecturing	The teacher instructs in moral education content through the description, explanation, and reasoning of moral education elements, clarifying key concepts and leading students to the analysis of certain questions, such as the advantages/ drawbacks of market economy; the irreversibility of globalization.
Discussion-based teaching	The students share their opinions on moral education topics in groups under the guidance of the teacher, who may join in the discussion when needed and lead students to intended direction.
Question-based teaching	The teacher puts forward a moral education-related question and encourages students' active thinking and participation into the analysis and discussion of possible solutions to the question.
Cooperative learning	Students work in groups to discuss or formulate a plan regarding an assigned moral education question and solve the question step by step.
Practicing	After instruction, students are given specific cases about moral education and encouraged to analyze the case either in small groups or individually.

3.3. An Individual Case: Session #1, Unit 8

The Unit 8 of Advanced Business English I is titled "Crisis Management". The first class session lasts 80 minutes and covers the warm-up and lead-in of the entire unit, which has 480 minutes in total. The teacher leads the teaching sections through asking moral education questions that will capture students' attention. Students are guided by the necessary instruction of the teacher and participate into the discussion and practice. They are required to discuss and answer questions in English only. The warm-up section of this unit is illustrated in Figure 1.

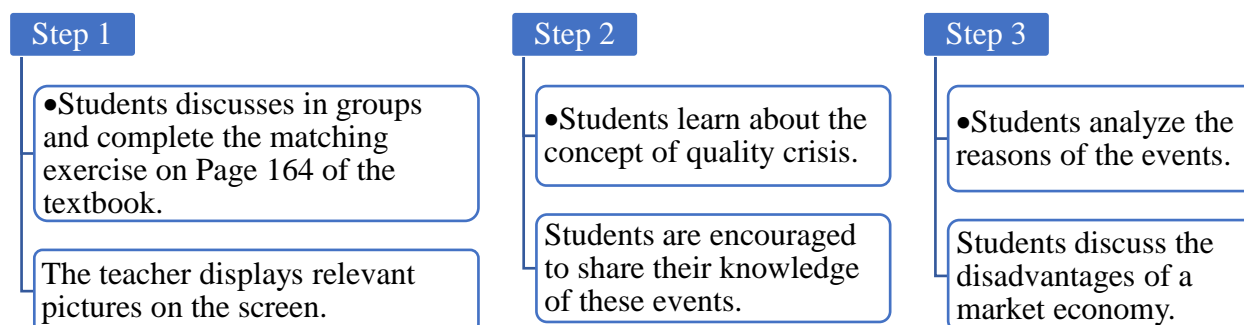


Figure 1. Warm-up: matching exercise and discussion (15 minutes)

The exercise is about quality crisis, which asks students to match five products (Teflon, KFC chicken wings, SK-II, Sanlu infant milk formula, Shuanghui meat product) with their respective quality problem (Melamine causing kidney stones, toxic ingredients of chromium, cancer-causing Sudan red coloring, cancer-causing non-stick coating, lean meat additives). Through the completion of the matching exercises about these famous brands or products, students become aware of the concept of quality crisis. Through the discussion of these quality events and the vital damage to customers, students are encouraged to analyze the reasons behind. Students are then guided to the discussion of the disadvantages of a market economy. After the warm-up section, the class proceeds to the lead-in section, which consists of the two cases in Figure 2.

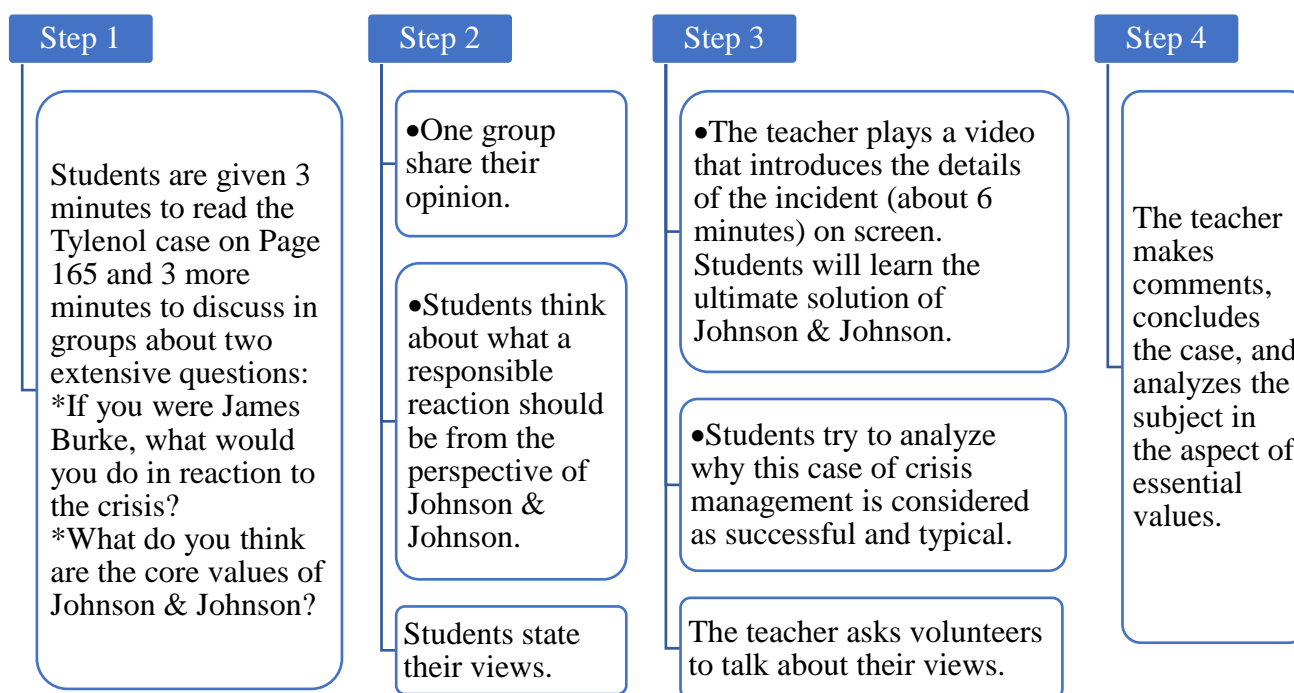


Figure 2. Lead-in A – analysis of the Tylenol case (25 minutes)

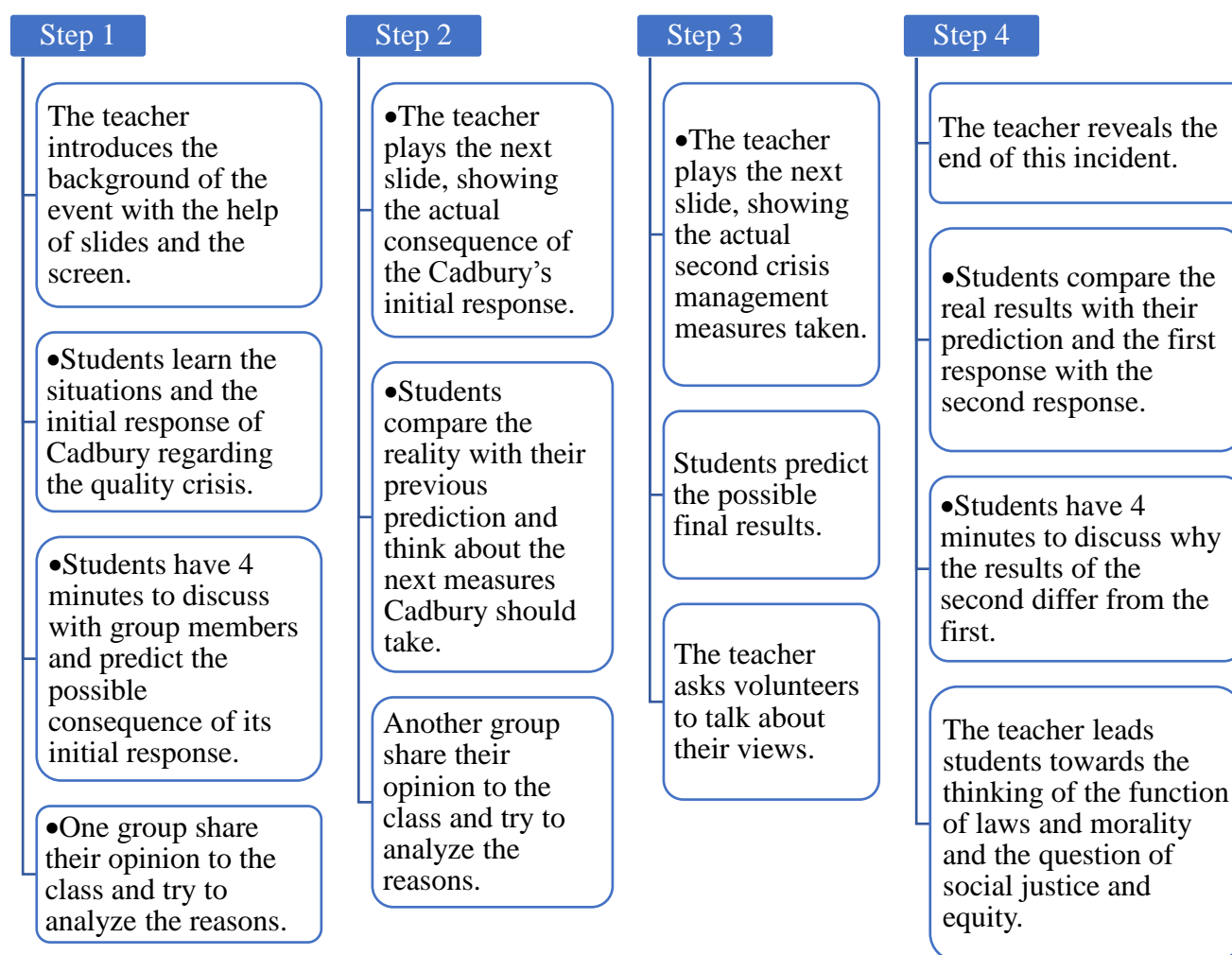


Figure 3. Lead-in B – interactive study of the Cadbury case (30 minutes)

During the lead-in sections, students are given opportunities to explore and discuss two typical cases regarding crisis management. In the Tylenol case, students have time to learn the background and share their opinions. They are encouraged play the roles of Johnson & Johnson and think about how to react. They will also learn about the success of their management. The case of Cadbury differs slightly from the Tylenol case, since it allows students' interactive experience in the event. Students will learn the situations of each step and make their own predictions. They can compare their predictions with the reality and come up with their understanding. Students will be guided and led against the wrong value and towards the correct value, as shown in Figure 3.

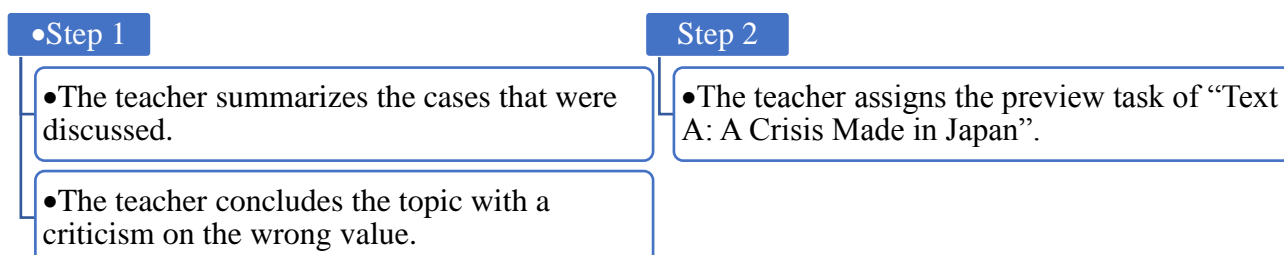


Figure 4. Summary and assignment (10 minutes)

At the end of Session #1, the teacher will use 10 minutes to summarize the class and answer questions, as well as assigning tasks. Moreover, the lessons and experience will be concluded, ensuring the learning results of the cases. Throughout the entire session, questions and tasks always dominate the class. Students have to discuss and cooperate with each other before they are able to complete each task, while the occasional lecturing by the teacher plays an essential role in the achievement of the intended teaching outcomes. Moral education elements are hidden among specialized teaching content and delivered by a mixture of teaching methods. When the students have completed the class assignments, the teaching objectives including the moral education objectives are also realized, as shown in Figure 4.

4. Conclusion

Moral education is the current and future focus of the teaching reform and development of Chinese universities and colleges. Yet, there is still room for moral education research, no matter in terms of theoretical framework establishment, moral education standard for university courses, or the coordination among the moral education in courses, moral education courses, and basic moral education teaching. This paper therefore analyzed the moral education design of foreign language major courses using the example of Advanced Business English I, a core major course in Chengdu Neusoft university, which identifies five bonding points of moral education integration under the guidance of the outcome-based education concept, namely “understanding western history and humanities”, “understanding market economy from a critical perspective”, “understanding the features of the time and trend of social development”, “establishing the awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship”, and “cultivating patriotism and advocating socialism”. The moral education content is merged into the teaching process by the methods of lecturing, discussion-based learning, question-based teaching, cooperative learning, and practicing. The case of session #1, unit 8, is a clear demonstration of how moral education elements are incorporated. The features and advantages of such a design pattern can be summarized as follows.

First, the integration of moral education elements achieves seamlessness. As opposed to a typical “moral education course”, which focuses solely on the learning of moral education content, this course gives up lengthy instruction and formalism; but spreads all the moral education elements, having no explicit “moral education moment”. As a result, students will not be aware of the fact that they are receiving moral education; they will still think of the course as a regular Business English course, thus avoiding any negative feelings. Yet, the correct view of life and world will have been established invisibly; in other words, the teaching objectives, especially the moral education teaching objectives will have been achieved.

Second, the teaching methods for moral education variate. Heuristic teaching, case study, and discussions are frequently used, rejecting the negative impacts of instructions as in a traditional lecture. This course pays particular attention to case analysis, which allows students to think actively in a given situation and search for the solution to the given questions by themselves during the semi-guided teaching process, hence leading to their critical view of different values.

Third, the effect of moral education endures. Comparing to the “one-time” didactic education, the moral education teaching pattern of this course utilizes each unit, each class, and each section, with moral education elements being everywhere in the course content, creating long term effects. For example, the case study in each unit involves specialized knowledge and attractive background situations. Students are often impressed by the cases, especially after discussions and analysis. Through the guidance and organization of the teacher, students would form the unforgettable correct view of the relevant event or people. The moral education teaching objective of the course would be achieved effortlessly.

Overall, the moral education design of this course values invisibility, aiming at seamless incorporation of moral education elements with the intrinsic teaching objectives of the course through various and reasonable teaching methods, which contributes to long term moral education learning outcomes, balancing the “teaching” requirements and the “cultivation” requirements. Regarding the effects of moral education in this course, the following research should focus on the collection of relevant data for evaluation and assessments of the ultimate learning outcomes of students; quantitative and qualitative data are both needed. In the future exploration of moral education in foreign language major courses, educators should excavate more potential bonding points of moral education elements in each unit, based on which effective moral education teaching design can be conducted and the organic combination of courses and moral education elements can be achieved.

Funding

This article is not supported by any foundation.

Data Availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Conflict of Interest

The author states that this article has no conflict of interest.

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