

# The Rationale, the Current Situation and the Implementation of the Learning Assessment for the Moral Education Integrated into Higher Vocational English Teaching

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**Abstract:** Integrating moral education into higher vocational college English has been specifically stated in the *English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition)*. To guarantee its effect and realize its learning objectives, this paper first elaborates the rationale for the moral education integrated into foreign language teaching and the application of formative assessment in foreign language course. Based on these rationales, focusing on the current situation in which most of the survey subjects fail to conduct the assessment in a satisfying manner, this paper proposes three main aspects of the assessment framework: (1) the content for assessment should be specified in terms of the moral educational elements, consistent with the teaching content; (2) the formative assessment should be adopted in either explicit or implicit ways according to the specific teaching content; (3) multiple subjects should be involved to meet the needs of giving feedback to students whenever necessary throughout the teaching process.

## 1. Introduction

According to *English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition)* (hereinafter referred to as the “English Curriculum Standards”), higher vocational English is “a compulsory public basic course for students in higher vocational education”. Public basic courses in vocational colleges are designed for students to study basic theories, basic knowledge and basic skills. Its role is to lay a solid foundation for students to master professional knowledge, study science and technology, and develop relevant abilities. In 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the Guiding Outline for the Ideological and Political Construction of Curriculum in Institutions of Higher Learning, emphasizing that “integrating moral education into curriculum” is the responsibility that every teacher must bear. From the perspective of classroom teaching, the connotation of the moral education integrated into foreign language course is that foreign language teachers, as the leading role, through foreign language teaching content, classroom management, assessment system and teachers’ words and deeds, will organically integrate the concept of moral cultivation into all aspects of foreign language classroom teaching, and strive to play a positive role in shaping students’ correct world outlook, outlook on life and values.<sup>[1]</sup>

The “English Curriculum Standards” pinpoints that the course teaching objects is to help students to achieve the development goals of the core discipline qualities, namely the foreign related communication goal in the workplace, the multicultural communication goal, the linguistic thinking improvement goal and the self-study improvement goal, each containing the requirement of practicing the core values of Chinese socialism, cultivating patriotism, establishing students’ virtues and fostering the elements of moral education.

The realization of curriculum objectives is closely related to whether the whole learning assessment is objective, scientific and comprehensive. Learning assessment is indispensable in foreign language teaching. It not only provides an important basis for teachers to obtain teaching feedback, improve teaching management and guarantee teaching quality, but also helps students

adjust learning strategies and methods, improving learning efficiency. It is also an important means to test teaching quality and promote the construction and development of the course. This paper is to build a framework for assessing students' achievement in terms of the moral education integrated into the higher vocational English course following the theoretical rationale and based on a survey about the current situation of the assessment implemented by higher vocational English teachers.

## 2. Theoretical Rationale

*The Guiding Opinions on the Formulation and Implementation of Professional Talents Training Program in Vocational Colleges* issued by the Ministry of Education clearly puts forward that vocational colleges should improve the diversified assessment system, and improve the monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanism of students' learning process. For foreign language courses, learning assessment involves three aspects: the assessment content (what to assess), the assessment method (how to do assessment) and the assessment subject (who will do assessment). All these three aspects can be the carrier for moral education integrated into the course. Thus, the theoretical rationale for this paper will be illustrated in terms of the content and the forms of the assessment on the moral education integrated into higher vocational English teaching.

### 2.1. Content for Assessment

As an applied foreign language cultural quality course, higher vocational English contains content that facilitates the organic integration and development of moral education.<sup>[2]</sup> The teaching content of the course is mostly the appreciation and comparison of Chinese and Western languages and cultural knowledge and values, many of which are closely related to the ideological and political education resources. Thus, higher vocational English course can fully realize the goal of moral education in the new era with its unique course content carrier.

Specifically, the *English Curriculum Standards* has stipulated that all the course teaching content should be organized against the vocational contexts that are closely related to the students' majors with the topics about "vocations and individuals", "vocations and society", or "vocations and environment". The teaching content serves the objectives of the integrated moral education that should go along with the educational goals of the nation, the school and the department, the general goals of the whole course and the teaching goals of each unit and each single lesson.

On the basis of an all-round understanding of the goal of education, teachers should deeply analyze what they teach. Moral education elements are usually embedded in teaching input materials, and may also be implied in practice activities.<sup>[1]</sup> Teachers should first understand the explicit foreign language core knowledge and skills taught in the classroom, and should also further explore the elements of moral education, such as value orientation, emotional qualities and self-management. That's to say, the elements of education must come from the teaching content itself, rather than being stuck on by teachers. Besides, the moral educational elements that can be excavated by each teaching unit are limited by the teaching materials and can only cover some elements in moral education. Teachers should make scientific choices, highlight key points and work hard on the depth.<sup>[3]</sup>

Learning assessment is to test the teaching qualities. According to what Xu proposed in her paper<sup>[4]</sup>, teachers should adopt reasonable and feasible standards and methods to evaluate the learning effect of moral educational content. For example, in terms of knowledge learning, except that the language knowledge and the knowledge of the subject content that students need to master should be set, the cultural concepts and values students need to understand should be clearly defined. In terms of the abilities to develop, except for the examination for checking students' language skills, they should also be evaluated for their ability to distinguish cultural situations, value orientation in the materials. The content and methods of evaluation should be integrated into the construction of moral educational content. When teachers design the examination paper, the materials used will reflect the author's position and views.<sup>[1]</sup> In other words, these materials contain the value orientation of the author. Thus, the proposer should conduct in-depth analysis of the examination or evaluation content, accurately capture the elements of moral education, and then

skillfully design the examination questions to enable students to interpret the value orientation of the materials, so as to help students improve their moral awareness. In addition to the examination, the evaluation of classroom teaching should also consciously put forward the value orientation issues related to the teaching content. Furthermore, in view of the rapid development of the times and the constant changes in students' learning situations and needs, the construction of moral educational content is a dynamic process, which requires teachers to pay close attention to students' feedback, and adjust and update materials in a timely manner based on the feedback. For example, students' learning data can be obtained through the online teaching management platform, their learning situation can be understood through students' reflection logs, so as to adjust and improve the construction and the use of materials.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 2.2. Forms of Assessment

There are two common assessment methods: formative assessment and summative assessment. Students' effort, their progress and the academic performance should be considered as the evaluation basis.<sup>[1]</sup> The summative assessment is represented by standardized examinations, and the formative assessment is aimed at learning and focuses on students' learning process.<sup>[5]</sup>

The concept of formative assessment was first put forward by M. Scriven, a philosopher at the University of Chicago, when he talked about curriculum reform in 1967. B.S. Bloom, an American educator, further applied formative assessment to educational assessment practice. Since the 1960s, formative assessment has attracted the attention of educators and curriculum providers. Formative assessment provides information for teachers to modify teaching plans and improve teaching activities in order to meet teaching requirements.<sup>[6]</sup> Foreign scholars have made explorations mainly into the purposes of formative assessment<sup>[7]</sup> and its object<sup>[8]</sup>. Some scholars studied the impact of formative assessment methods on teaching through questionnaires, classroom observation, etc, confirming the importance of formative assessment and its positive impact on teachers and students.<sup>[9-10]</sup>

Since the 1990s, with the continuous deepening of foreign language teaching research, more and more domestic experts and scholars have begun to pay attention to the research methods of foreign language teaching.<sup>[11-13]</sup> Zhao Chunrong<sup>[14]</sup>, Chen Lian<sup>[15]</sup> and some other scholars elaborated on the concept, main characteristics, necessity, guiding principles, implementation methods and functions of formative assessment in English teaching. Formative assessment should be based on the following principles: the principle of subjectivity, incentive, practicality, process, openness, development, multiple evaluation and the combination of qualitative and quantitative principles. Running through the whole teaching process, the commonly used formative assessment methods mainly include classroom testing, teacher assessment, student self-assessment and mutual peer assessment, interviewing, growth portfolio, etc. In the whole teaching process, teachers and students together become the subject of assessment, and assessment serves the adjustment of the teaching process. From the feedback, teachers get to know the problems in students' learning in a timely manner, which is also conducive to students help to adjust their own learning strategies and methods in time, enhancing their learning interest and self-confidence, and improving their learning efficiency, so as to better achieve the teaching objectives. The pluralism of assessment subjects is also an important embodiment of moral education integrated in English classes. Teachers can ask students to assess themselves or assess each other, because whether students can correctly assess themselves or their peers is not only a matter of language proficiency, but also can reflect whether they have a proper learning attitude and the ability of self-reflection and cooperative learning.

## 3. The Current Situation

With respect to the learning assessment on moral education integrated into the higher vocational English course, a questionnaire survey was conducted from the following aspects: (1) the awareness of integrating moral educational elements in the learning assessment, (2) the current implementation of assessing the effect of moral education integrated into the higher vocational English course, (3) teachers' attitude towards assessing the effects of moral education integrated into the higher

vocational English course, (4) the content for assessing the effect of moral education integrated into the higher vocational English course. The subjects of the survey were higher vocational English teachers from three vocational colleges in Guangdong Provinces. Altogether, a total of 52 effective questionnaires have been taken back.

Table 1 The Awareness of Integrating Moral Educational Elements in the Learning Assessment

Question: Have you ever tried to test the effect of moral education integrated in your English teaching?

	Number of teachers	Percentage
Yes, always.	6	11.54%
Yes, sometimes.	25	48.08%
No.	21	40.38%

Data in Table 1 show that among all the teachers, only 11.54% teachers the effect of moral education integrated into their teaching all the way, while 21 subjects in the survey have not tried to assess the development of their students in terms of the ideology and values. Reasons for this will be varied, and it is not difficult to see that the system of moral education integrated into higher vocational English teaching has not been established in teachers.

Table 2 The Current Implementation of Assessing the Effect of Moral Education Integrated into the Higher Vocational English Course

Question: What methods have you ever used to test the effect the moral education in English classes?

	Number of teachers	Percentage
Design exercises in the test paper.	4	7.69%
Design a survey to ask for students' opinion.	4	7.69%
Raise questions for assessment in class orally.	23	44.23%
Design a project for assessment.	26	50%
Others. _____.	5	9.62%
Never design the assessment.	26	50%

For Question 2, the survey subjects can choose more than one answers. The results shown in Table 2 are consistent with that in Table 1. Half of the survey subjects have never designed an assessment for testing the effect of moral education in the English classes, while half of them choose to design a project for assessment. In particular, 4 teachers have even designed specific exercises for testing the effect of the moral education in their English teaching, Though only 4 of all the subjects have tried to measure the development of students' ideology in a quantitative manner, most of the subjects hold that students' achievement in moral education can be reflected in practical projects.

Table 3 Teachers' Attitude Towards Assessing the Effect of Moral Education Integrated into the Higher Vocational English Course

Question: What do you think of the learning assessment on the effect moral education integrated into Higher Vocational English teaching?

	Number of teachers	Percentage
It is necessary and feasible in both qualitative and quantitative manners.	12	23.08%
It is necessary but feasible only in a qualitative manner.	8	15.38%
It is necessary but difficult to conduct.	30	57.69%
It is unnecessary.	2	3.85%

Table 3 illustrates the attitude held by the subjects. Moral education integrated into the language

class should be passed to students in an invisible way or in a visible way closely rooted in the teaching content. Besides, it is commonly acknowledged that one's ideology is reflected in his behavior and the language being used. Thus, it is not unusual that more nearly 60% teachers in the survey find it difficult to design the assessment for testing the effect of moral education in higher vocational English classes, though only 2 survey subjects do not regard it as necessary.

Table 4 The Content for Assessing the Effect of Moral Education Integrated into the Higher Vocational English Course

Question: What do you think should be assessed in terms of the moral education integrated into the Higher Vocational English Course?

	Number of teachers	Percentage
The connotation of the cultural concepts	50	100%
Cultural values	40	80%
Practice of virtue	50	100%
Professional ethic	28	56%
Others	32	64%

Only the 50 subjects who think it necessary for assessment on moral education in English teaching will answer Question 4, which asking for the content that should be or can be tested in the assessment. The majority of subjects in the survey hold that cultural concepts, values and virtue should be and can be tested, however, for professional ethic, only 56% teachers in the survey choose it as the content for assessment. It should be noticed that 64% teachers think there should be more about students' ideology besides the for aspects that have been mentioned.

#### 4. Implementation of the Assessment

The result of the survey shows that teachers should further raise their awareness of implementing moral education in every teaching step throughout the teaching process and should further reform their notions on the connotation of moral education integrated into higher vocational college English teaching. Foreign language learning assessment involves three aspects: content (i.e. what to assess), method (i.e. how to assess) and subject (i.e. who will assess). For the higher vocational English courses, the three aspects of the learning assessment should be cultural, general, international and vocational, which are the most typical characteristics of the course.

##### 4.1. Specify Content for Assessment

Learning assessment is to serve the teaching goal with the assessment content being consistent with the teaching content. The content of higher vocational English is related to English pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric and other knowledge, as well as cross-cultural translation skills and the spread and learning of European and American cultures and values. These contents can be easily combined with teaching resources of a high ideological and political nature.

With different focuses in cultivating people, higher vocational English courses have their main goals of moral education that need to be highlighted. For example, some contents focus on the humanistic spirit and socialist core values, some contain professionalism and craftsmanship, and some reflect competition and cooperation spirit as well as international vision and feelings. To integrate moral education into higher vocational English teaching, teachers need to excavate and sequence the teaching content; to design assessment for the effect of this moral education, according to the test content, teachers can design test questions with value orientation to give full play to the ideological and political functions of the test content. Besides, when teachers conducting immediate classroom assessment, timely guidance should also be given if students' value orientation is found to be biased.

##### 4.2. Apply both the Explicit and Implicit Form of the Formative Assessment

When carrying out English teaching activities in higher vocational colleges, teachers could adopt

such teaching methods as production-oriented approach, task-based language teaching, case study, action-oriented method and theme-based experiential teaching so as to activate the teaching content that moral education relies on, and achieve the implicit effect of moral education integrated into English teaching. With all the teaching methods that are being used, today's vocational college English teaching focuses more on students' learning process. More attention has been put on students' quality and accomplishment, thinking ability and innovation spirit, autonomous learning and cooperative learning ability. Therefore, formative assessment, which is looking at students' progress and development in the learning process should be applied to test students' recognition and ideology.

Being action-oriented is one of the important characteristics of higher vocational education. This system insists on teacher-student interaction, and enables students to master professional skills, obtain relevant knowledge, and build up their own experience and knowledge system through the hands-on and mental practice of accessing information, making plans, implementing plans, and evaluating plans. Thus, the "action" here includes the subjective conscious action and objective concrete action of the individual. This action-oriented framework based on the situation principle integrates teaching activities and professional actions, regarding students' learning process as the centre and the practical situation as the main carrier.

With the current teaching notions and the characteristics of the vocational college English teaching in mind, formative assessment is supposed to be implemented, running through the whole teaching process. For example, it can be designed in the written form with questions checking students' understanding of some cultural or ideological concepts in an explicit way. It can be carried out orally during the in-class teacher-student interactions in an implicit or explicit form with teachers adjusting their instructions according to students' oral feedback and helping students build up a correct value system. It can also be done in the process when students are taking actions to accomplish a task or a project that is set with the professional or vocational context. Students' action is led by ideology. It is providing timely feedback or comment on their action that can help to improve their qualities in an explicit or implicit manner, and in the other way round, explicitly giving suggestions on their ideology will lead to the positive changes in their actions. In addition, students' self-assessment or self-reflection is another way for teachers to supervise the changes and improvement in students' thought.

#### **4.3. Involve Multiple Subjects for Assessment**

To apply the formative assessment throughout the teaching process, the pluralism of assessment subjects is regarded as necessary. It is also an important embodiment of moral education integrated into higher vocational English teaching for students' ideology will influence their language and action at any time. Besides teachers, evaluators should also include individual students or peers, enterprise mentors and foreign experts. For another thing, teachers can ask students to assess themselves and each other for whether students can correctly assess themselves or their peers is not only a matter of language proficiency, but also can reflect whether they have the ability of self-reflection, cooperative learning and learning attitude to emulate those better than themselves.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Integrating moral education into higher vocational college English has been illustrated in terms of the course teaching objectives, the teaching content. From the survey investigating teachers' notion on assessing the effect of moral education in their language teaching, it can be seen that just a few teachers could fully put the moral education in English teaching into practice. Based on the rationale provided by the current studies in moral education integrated into foreign language teaching and the previous research in formative assessment, we suggest that the testing the learning effect of moral education integrated into higher vocational college English teaching should be conducted with formative assessment involving different necessary assessment subjects throughout the course learning process in either implicit and explicit ways with the assessment content conforming to the teaching content. The fulfillment of the learning assessment is the guarantee of

realizing the goal of the moral education integrated into higher vocational college English teaching.

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