

Research on the Construction of the English Course System "Understanding Contemporary China"

Chang Huo*

Heilongjiang International University, Harbin, 150025, China

*Corresponding author: huochang@hiu.net.cn

Abstract: Against the backdrop of globalization, China's development and transformation have attracted widespread attention. To help Chinese students better understand and communicate the social, cultural, and economic development of contemporary China in an international context, constructing the English course series "Understanding Contemporary China" holds significant importance. This study, based on the principles of cross-cultural adaptability, multidimensional content selection, and interactive and practical teaching, proposes a course design plan that covers reading, writing, translation, and public speaking. By exploring the course implementation path, the study presents specific strategies for integrating teaching materials, building faculty teams, and innovating teaching models. This research provides theoretical support and practical guidance for improving the cross-cultural communication skills of Chinese students and promoting the construction of Chinese studies curricula in international exchanges.

Keywords: Understanding Contemporary China; English courses; cross-cultural adaptability; teaching innovation; international education

Introduction

As China's influence on the global stage continues to rise, the need for domestic students to engage with and understand the international community is also growing. In higher education, more and more Chinese students seek systematic learning to enhance their cross-cultural communication skills in an international context, and better introduce China's political, economic, social, and cultural phenomena to the world. Thus, constructing a comprehensive curriculum that enables Chinese students to introduce contemporary China in English has become particularly important.

1. Design Principles of the English Course Series "Understanding Contemporary China"

1.1 Cross-Cultural Adaptability in Course Design

In constructing the English course series "Understanding Contemporary China," the principle of cross-cultural adaptability is of paramount importance. Although the target audience is Chinese students, they face challenges in introducing and explaining Chinese culture, social structures, and political systems to the international community. Therefore, course design should focus on cultivating students' cross-cultural communication skills in a global context, ensuring that they can present China's unique characteristics in ways that are internationally acceptable. Through comparisons of political systems, social customs, and values between China and the West, students can deepen their understanding of their own culture while effectively communicating China's social structure and cultural features. Moreover, the course should emphasize students' ability to accurately express Chinese culture in English, ensuring that their language aligns with international standards and avoids cultural biases and misunderstandings. Interactive teaching and cultural immersion activities are also key to enhancing students' cross-cultural communication skills. Practical exercises and simulated cross-cultural scenarios help students confidently convey contemporary Chinese social phenomena and cultural meanings in international settings.^[1]

1.2 Multidimensional Content Selection

The content design of the "Understanding Contemporary China" series should reflect the principle of

multidimensionality, meaning that it covers a wide range of topics while delving deeply into key issues in various fields. These courses must present a comprehensive view of contemporary China from multiple angles, including politics, economics, culture, and society, ensuring that students gain a well-rounded and profound understanding. For example, in politics, the course can explore China's governance model, party-government relations, and China's role in global governance; in economics, topics like China's economic reforms, development models, and the impact of the "Belt and Road" initiative should be included; in culture, the course could discuss the integration of traditional and modern culture, and the rise of cultural soft power. This multidimensional content design not only helps students grasp China's development and changes from different perspectives but also encourages them to engage in interdisciplinary thinking, thus enhancing their analytical skills and critical thinking.

1.3 Interaction and Practicality in Teaching Methods

The principles of interaction and practicality in teaching methods are crucial for the "Understanding Contemporary China" series. The interaction principle emphasizes increasing student participation and learning outcomes through teacher-student interaction, peer interaction, and cross-cultural exchanges. Various interactive methods should be employed, such as group discussions, case studies, role-playing, and debates, to help students deepen their understanding of the course content through interaction. Additionally, the practicality principle requires that the course design go beyond theoretical instruction by offering students opportunities to engage in social practice. For example, the course could organize field trips, cultural immersion projects, or use virtual reality to simulate Chinese social environments and cultural scenes. These practical activities not only help students connect theoretical knowledge with real-world application but also enhance their direct experiences and deep understanding of society, thereby improving the course's effectiveness and student satisfaction.

2. Content Design of the English Course Series "Understanding Contemporary China"

2.1 Reading and Writing Module

The reading and writing module aims to comprehensively enhance students' academic English reading and writing skills, particularly in the accurate and logical discussion of topics related to China. This module will carefully select English-language literature on Chinese politics, economics, society, and culture to help students, through systematic reading, deepen their understanding of contemporary China and learn how to conduct rigorous academic writing in English.

Specifically, the course will progressively increase the difficulty of reading materials, gradually training students' critical thinking and in-depth analysis skills. In writing, the course will focus on guiding students in composing various academic genres, such as argumentative essays, analytical reports, and research abstracts, requiring them to combine China's complex social phenomena with internationally accepted theoretical frameworks for deeper analysis and discussion. Additionally, the course will encourage frequent writing practice, fostering clear, logical academic expression, ensuring that students can accurately and effectively convey China's perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and social characteristics in English academic writing.^[2]

2.2 Translation Module

The translation module aims to cultivate students' ability to accurately translate Chinese materials into English, particularly when addressing topics involving Chinese culture, social phenomena, and specialized terminology, ensuring accuracy and cultural consistency. The course design will cover various types of texts, including government policy documents, literary works, news reports, and academic articles, helping students master translation strategies and techniques for different genres while developing the ability to flexibly apply translation skills in diverse contexts.

During translation training, the course will focus on the impact of cultural differences on translation, especially when dealing with culturally specific phenomena and expressions, guiding students in selecting the most appropriate English equivalents to preserve the integrity and consistency of the original intent and style. The course will also delve into common challenges in translation, such as handling ambiguous terms, adjusting to context, and ensuring that the translation remains faithful to the original while meeting the norms of English language usage and cultural expectations. Furthermore, through practical translation exercises, students will learn how to produce high-quality translations that adhere to

English linguistic standards while accurately conveying the profound cultural connotations of Chinese texts, enhancing their translation skills in international communication.^[3]

2.3 Public Speaking Module

The public speaking module aims to comprehensively improve students' English-speaking abilities, particularly in delivering effective presentations on the international stage, representing the image and voice of contemporary China. The course will focus on training students in public speaking techniques, covering aspects such as linguistic accuracy, fluency of expression, logical content structure, and the management of posture and vocal control during speeches to ensure an overall effective presentation.

The course design will include a variety of representative speech topics covering China's political system, economic development, social reforms, and cultural traditions, requiring students to conduct in-depth research, prepare speeches, and present them. In teaching, simulated international conferences and academic forums will be utilized, allowing students to practice formal public speaking in real-life scenarios, familiarizing them with the challenges and strategies for delivering speeches in formal settings. Additionally, the course will emphasize training students in improvisational skills and interactive communication techniques, enabling them to confidently and calmly respond to questions, handle unexpected situations, and engage in discussions. This will help them effectively maintain and showcase China's international image and cultural confidence, enhancing their communication and expression skills in global contexts.

3. Implementation Path of the English Course Series "Understanding Contemporary China"

3.1 Development and Integration of Textbooks and Teaching Resources

In the implementation of the "Understanding Contemporary China" series of English courses, the development and integration of textbooks and teaching resources are core elements to ensure course quality and effectiveness. To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be considered, focusing on cross-cultural adaptability, diversified resources, and a combination of localized and global perspectives:

3.1.1 Systematization and Modularization of Content

The development of textbooks should follow the principles of systematization and modularization to ensure comprehensiveness and logical coherence. The course content should be divided into core modules, each exploring specific topics in-depth. For instance, the "Contemporary Chinese Politics and Governance" module could cover China's political system, policy-making processes, national governance structure, and its role on the international stage. This content should include political theory, case studies, and policy analysis to help students understand the operational mechanisms of China's political system and its influence on societal development. Each module should feature theoretical introductions, case analysis, discussion topics, and supplementary reading materials to foster students' in-depth understanding and critical thinking.^[4]

3.1.2 Integration of Diversified Teaching Resources

To enhance the interactivity and effectiveness of teaching, the course should integrate various forms of teaching resources:

Use online course platforms to provide supplementary learning materials and combine VR technology to create immersive learning experiences. For example, through virtual reality, students can "visit" famous Chinese landmarks or experience daily life in China, gaining a vivid understanding of Chinese society and culture.

Incorporate multimedia resources such as video lectures, animations, and interactive charts to enrich teaching content and increase student engagement and learning effectiveness. These resources should closely align with the textbook content to enhance course appeal and information transmission.

Invite Chinese and international experts for special lectures or webinars to provide students with first-hand insights and data. This broadens students' perspectives and offers a rich reference for classroom discussions.

3.1.3 Combining Localization and Global Perspectives

In the development of textbooks and resources, the combination of localized and global perspectives should be emphasized to ensure broad applicability and internationalization:

Course content should be based on China's social, historical, and cultural contexts, ensuring an accurate reflection of the current Chinese situation. Through a deep understanding of China's reality, students can gain genuine knowledge rather than superficial theoretical exposure.

While introducing China, comparisons with international contexts should be made. For example, when discussing China's economic development, it can be compared with other major economies (e.g., the U.S., Europe) to help students contextualize China's trajectory within the global economic system.

3.2 Teacher Training and Team Building

Teacher training and team building are central to the effective implementation of the "Understanding Contemporary China" series of English courses, directly affecting course quality and teaching outcomes. To achieve course objectives and improve teaching standards, systematic and comprehensive strategies should focus on the following areas:

3.2.1 Cross-disciplinary Expertise

The successful implementation of the course relies on a teaching team with cross-disciplinary expertise. When hiring teachers, priority should be given to candidates with the following qualifications and backgrounds:

Select experts with deep knowledge of Chinese politics, economics, and culture. These candidates should have a strong academic background and practical experience. Additionally, they must be proficient in English to accurately convey complex Chinese contexts to students.^[5]

The teaching team should also include educators familiar with modern education theories, teaching methods, and classroom management techniques. These educators can effectively transform complex theoretical knowledge into comprehensible and engaging content for students.

3.2.2 Teacher Training and Capacity Building

To ensure teachers can effectively implement the "Understanding Contemporary China" series of English courses, systematic training and capacity building should be conducted, covering the following aspects:

Organize structured teacher training programs, covering the latest course resources, teaching methods, cross-cultural communication techniques, and classroom interaction strategies. Training should include both theoretical learning and practical exercises, helping teachers stay up-to-date on course content developments and effective teaching strategies.

Introduce interactive elements such as case analysis and field visits, allowing teachers to gain practical experience. These elements help teachers understand and address real-world challenges in teaching, enhancing their teaching competence and course adaptability.

Training content should include modern teaching methods and the use of technology, such as flipped classrooms, interactive teaching, and online teaching tools, to increase classroom engagement and student participation.

3.2.3 Continuous Professional Development

To ensure teachers keep pace with the latest research and educational trends, a mechanism for continuous professional development is crucial:

Encourage teachers to participate in international academic conferences, seminars, and professional development courses. These activities help teachers stay informed about the latest developments in international education, broadening their academic perspectives and improving their teaching capabilities.

Encourage teachers to write and publish research papers related to the course and engage in cross-border collaborative projects. This enhances their academic standing and enables the exchange of new teaching resources and methods.

Establish a regular evaluation and feedback mechanism to systematically assess teaching effectiveness. Based on assessment results, provide targeted improvement suggestions and support to

ensure teachers continuously improve their teaching skills.

3.3 Innovation and Promotion of Teaching Methods

Innovation and promotion of teaching methods are key to ensuring the effective implementation of the "Understanding Contemporary China" series of English courses. By introducing advanced teaching models, the course's teaching effectiveness and student learning experience can be significantly enhanced. Below are several strategies for innovation and promotion:

3.3.1 Blended Learning Model

The blended learning model combines online and offline learning resources, providing a flexible and comprehensive learning experience. The key to this model is the effective integration of online platforms with traditional classroom teaching:

Establish a comprehensive online learning platform that offers abundant theoretical knowledge, extracurricular reading materials, and multimedia resources. Students can autonomously access these resources to gain an initial understanding of course content and background knowledge.

Classroom time should focus on discussions, case analyses, and practical exercises. Teachers can adjust classroom activities based on students' performance in online learning to ensure discussions are targeted and effective.

The blended learning model allows students to study at their convenience, enhancing flexibility. Teachers can adjust the ratio of online and offline activities based on course progress and student feedback, achieving personalized teaching.

3.3.2 Flipped Classroom and Project-based Learning

The flipped classroom model and project-based learning can effectively enhance students' active learning abilities and practical application skills:

Transfer traditional lecture content to extracurricular learning through video lectures, reading materials, and online quizzes. Classroom time is dedicated to in-depth discussions, answering questions, and interactive activities, allowing students to apply and expand on what they have learned outside the classroom. This model helps focus classroom time on high-value learning activities instead of mere information delivery.

Project-based learning introduces course-related project tasks, enabling students to apply what they have learned to real-world challenges. Through designed problems and case studies, students can work in teams to solve complex issues, enhancing their analytical and problem-solving abilities. Project tasks can include research reports, case analyses, and presentations, promoting a deeper understanding and practical application of course content.^[6]

During the project-driven process, teachers should provide timely feedback and guidance, helping students continually adjust and optimize their solutions. Through feedback during practice, students can recognize their shortcomings and make improvements, thereby enhancing learning outcomes and practical skills.

3.3.3 Interactive Learning and Assessment

Interactive learning methods enhance student participation and learning motivation, while diversified assessment methods comprehensively evaluate students' learning outcomes:

Introduce interactive forms such as group discussions, role-playing, simulated practices, and field visits to encourage active participation in course activities. Through interactive learning, students can deepen their understanding of the content and develop teamwork and communication skills.

Implement process-based assessments and project-based evaluations to comprehensively assess students' learning outcomes and development. Process-based assessments can include classroom participation, discussion performance, and task completion, while project-based evaluations focus on students' performance in practical tasks and problem-solving abilities. This assessment method provides comprehensive feedback on students' learning, promoting continuous improvement.

Establish a systematic feedback mechanism, providing students with regular evaluations and guidance on their progress. Teachers should adjust teaching strategies based on feedback to ensure the content and methods are adaptable and effective.

Conclusion

This study, through a systematic analysis of the design principles, content structure, and implementation paths of the "Understanding Contemporary China" English course series, has established a curriculum framework centered on cross-cultural adaptability, multidimensional content selection, and interactive, practical teaching methods. This curriculum not only offers students diverse perspectives and approaches to understanding contemporary China but also provides educators with a wealth of teaching resources and innovative instructional models. In the future, as global educational demands continue to evolve, this course system must be continuously adjusted and improved in practice to better meet students' needs and promote the global dissemination of Chinese culture.

Fund project

2022 General Project of Higher Education Teaching Reform in Heilongjiang Province "Research on English Curriculum Development and Construction of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era", project number SJGY20220716

References

- [1] Xia Dengshan. *The Critical Thinking in "Understanding Contemporary China: An English Reading and Writing Course"*[J]. *China ESP Research*, 2024,(02):1-10+164.
- [2] Liu Le. *The Philosophy of Security in Understanding Contemporary China*[J]. *International Security Studies*, 2024,42(04):53-77+157-158.
- [3] Liu Li. *Course Construction and Textbook Research of "Understanding Contemporary China"*[J]. *International Chinese Education (Bilingual)*, 2024,9(02):5-6.
- [4] Liu Xiaotong. *An Analysis of China's Image in "Understanding Contemporary China: Advanced Chinese Listening and Speaking Tutorial"*[D]. *Shandong University of Finance and Economics*, 2024.
- [5] Chen Xiao, Zhang Zhijun. *Research on Ecological Stories in "Understanding Contemporary China: An English Reading and Writing Course"*[J]. *Popular Literature and Art*, 2024,(05):96-98.
- [6] Zhong Guanping. *Application Research on the "Understanding Contemporary China" Series "Advanced Chinese Listening and Speaking Tutorial"*[D]. *Beijing Foreign Studies University*, 2023.