

# Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education: Research Focuses and Evolution

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## Abstract

Recent years, research on curriculum-based ideological and political education has been one of hotspots in the field of higher education in China. Using both literature analysis software of CiteSpace and VOSviewer, visual analysis and information collection have been carried out on 429 papers of Chinese curriculum-based ideological and political education from 2014 to 2021, so as to find out the research focuses and evolution in this field and then to predict the trend in the future. The results are that the hotspots of ideological and political research focus on the definition of its connotation, construction value, and the exploration of practical paths. Furthermore, current research frontiers including “ideological and political elements”, “talent cultivation”, “college physical education (PE)” and “core socialist values” reflect that the current study focuses on the exploration of practical paths. It is expected that education mechanism, teaching practice research and multidisciplinary research will become the main trends of curriculum-based ideological and political education in China in future.

**Keywords:** curriculum-based ideological and political education, education mechanism, multidisciplinary research, teaching practice research, visual analysis

## 1. Introduction

The implementation of curriculum-based ideological and political education in China has mainly relied on some certain courses for a long time. The backward educational concepts, boring course content, single teaching mode, and limited class hours have no longer meet the needs of talent cultivation at present. Through in-depth researches on the higher education in China, many scholars have found that the distortion and lack of values are the biggest problems that need to be solved urgently in Chinese higher education (Qiu et al., 2016). In December 2016, the National Conference on Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education solved the disconnection between teaching and education in higher education and started ideological and political courses nationwide. With the promotion of ideological and political curriculum, the research on teaching reform of higher education has gradually become a hotspot in the new era. However, what are current focuses and frontiers of curriculum-based ideological and political education? What is the development trend in the future? Based on these problems, the author conducts a panoramic observation and analysis of the papers on curriculum-based ideological and political education so as to realize the current situations and deficiencies in this field and then to predict the trend in the future.

The literature from China National Knowledge Internet (CNKI) database in this paper are set from January 1, 2014 to July 30, 2021, because 2014 is the first year of curriculum-based ideological and political education as a pilot project in universities of Shanghai (Fan, 2017). Based on bibliometric method and co-occurrence analysis method, the relevant literature on curriculum-based ideological and political education in China can be visually analyzed and information mined with the help of CiteSpace and VOSviewer which are able to draw a knowledge map to clarify its development trend, track hotspots and predict research frontiers. It is aimed to provide objective and accurate references for further guidance and the formulation of policies in this field, and also a decision-making basis for promoting the reform of curriculum-based ideological and political education in higher education.

## 2. Data and Method

This paper selected the sub-database of academic journals of CNKI, set “curriculum-based ideological and

political education” and “colleges and universities” as the subject headings, ranged from 2014 to 2021, and the locked literature source categories were Peking University core periodical catalogue, CSSCI journals and CSCD journals. After retrieval and manual screening, non-academic journal papers such as book reviews, interview transcripts, meeting minutes, call for papers, and journal introductions were excluded, and eventually 429 papers were refined (as of July 30, 2021).

CiteSpace5.8.R1 and VOSviewer1.6.17 are selected as research tools based on problems to be solved in this paper. The former has unique advantages in time series analysis (Gao et al., 2018), while the latter has significant advantages in co-occurrence network clustering, mapping and density analysis (Zhang et al., 2012; Gao et al., 2018). Furthermore, another unique function of VOSviewer is the usage of “a unified approach to mapping networks, and inclusion of clustering methods in the scientometric network analysis” (Waltman et al., 2010). According to the refined 429 literatures, CiteSpace5.8.R1 and VOSviewer1.6.17 are used to draw graphs, such as keyword co-occurrence, density view, timezone view, mutation word list and so on, which are used to analyze the current hotspots and trends of curriculum-based ideological and political education in China.

### 3. Data analysis and Discussion

#### 3.1 Research Focuses

Keywords are the essence of literatures because they are high-frequency words extracted from papers reflecting themes (Zong et al., 2011). Co-word analysis can be used to find the “hot” topics and research trends of a certain research field (Leung et al., 2017). Moreover, the index of Centrality is used to indicate the “power” of nodes in the network (Freeman, 1978). Table 1 is a list of keywords whose betweenness centrality scores are higher than zero. As key terms in curriculum-based ideological and political education, these high-frequency keywords represent hotspots and directions in this field. The nodes of high betweenness centrality (i.e. score of betweenness centrality  $\geq 0.1$ ) are important research turning points (Li & Chen, 2016). According to the centrality and frequency of keywords, top five are greater than 0.1, including “curriculum-based ideological and political education”, “college ideological and political courses”, “college ideological education”, “ideological and political theory courses” and “morality education”. Thus, it can be preliminarily judged that ideological and political theory and college ideological and political courses are of great significance in curriculum-based ideological and political education.

Table 1. A keywords list of the frequency of citations and betweenness centrality

| No. | Keywords   | Frequency | Betweenness Centrality |
|-----|--|-----------|------------------------|
| 1   | Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education                       | 239       | 0.72                   |
| 2   | College Ideological and Political Courses                                  | 82        | 0.36                   |
| 3   | College Ideological Education  | 64        | 0.37                   |
| 4   | Ideological and Political Theory Courses                                   | 51        | 0.36                   |
| 5   | Morality Education   | 48        | 0.11                   |
| 6   | Cooperative Education  | 23        | 0.02                   |
| 7   | Teaching Reform  | 19        | 0.02                   |
| 8   | Three-wide Education   | 18        | 0.04                   |
| 9   | Ideological and Political Construction                                     | 16        | 0.05                   |
| 10  | Specialized Courses  | 16        | 0.02                   |
| 11  | Value Guidance   | 14        | 0.04                   |
| 12  | New era  | 12        | 0.01                   |
| 13  | Path   | 12        | 0.02                   |
| 14  | Educators of Ideological and Political Courses                             | 9         | 0.05                   |
| 15  | College Ideological and Political Courses                                  | 6         | 0.04                   |
| 16  | Ideological and Political Teaching   | 5         | 0.02                   |
| 17  | Tea Culture  | 4         | 0.1                    |
| 18  | Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era | 4         | 0.01                   |
| 19  | PE   | 3         | 0.01                   |
| 20  | PE Teaching  | 2         | 0.01                   |
| 21  | Party Organization of Secondary Colleges                                   | 2         | 0.01                   |
| 22  | People-oriented  | 2         | 0.02                   |
| 23  | Professional Curriculum System   | 2         | 0.03                   |

Figure 1 is the co-occurrence density view of keywords imported the literature data into VOSviewer. According to the difference in the density of frequency, 7 clusters are formed (indicated by the dotted box in Figure 2), whose labels are curriculum-based ideological and political education, college ideological and political courses, ideological and political theory courses, colleges and universities, ideological and political construction, teaching reform, and three-wide education. The keywords in each cluster are highly correlated, forming a relatively independent clustering network and reflecting the hotspots and their main contents.

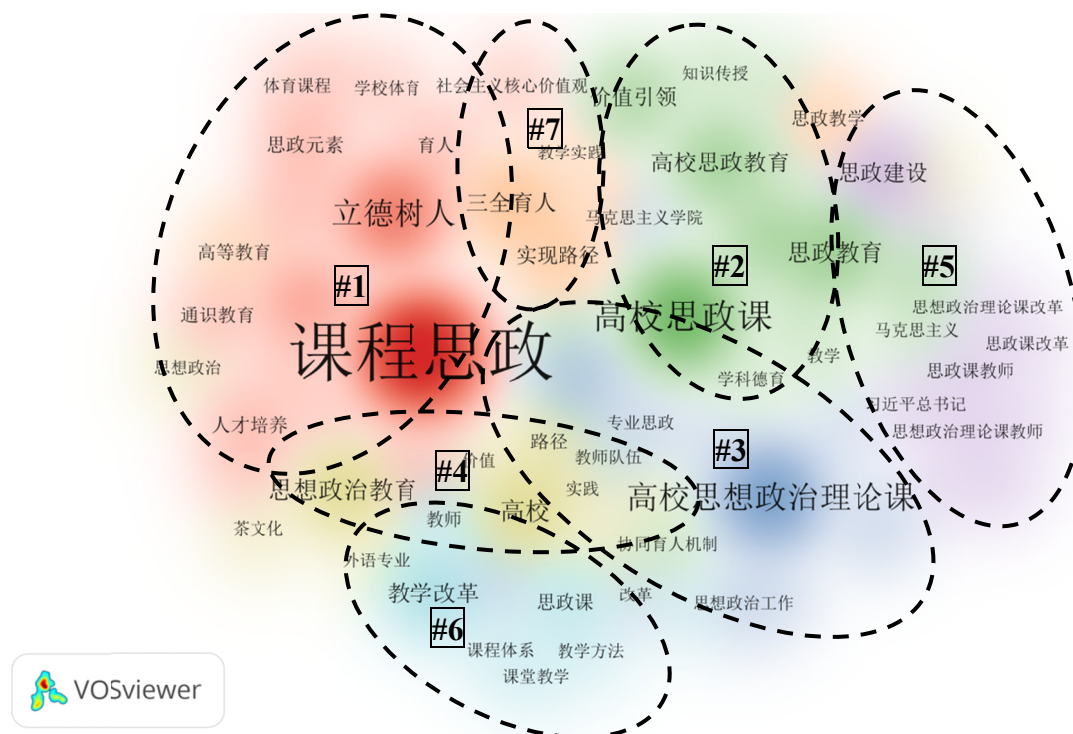


Figure 1. Keyword co-occurrence density view based on VOSviewer (2014-2021)

*Note.* All the data from CNKI are from the literatures in Chinese, so the keywords in Figure 1 from VOSviewer are all showed in Chinese.

Based on the co-occurrence density view of keyword in VOSviewer, this paper has analyzed results of node frequency and betweenness centrality centrality in the keyword co-occurrence graph of CiteSpace. It has been found that the research hotspots of curriculum-based ideological and political education from 2014 to 2021 mainly focus on three themes.

#### Hotspot 1: Definition of the connotation of ideological and political education

It has only been six or seven years since the concept of curriculum-based ideological and political education was put forward. The early research mainly involved the exploration of the nature and the definition of concepts, including the interpretation of curriculum-based ideological and political policies and differences between curriculum-based ideological and political education and ideological and political courses. From Table 1, it can be seen that the top keywords in terms of frequency and centrality all involve two major themes, which are college ideological and political courses and ideological and political education. Meanwhile, at the upper right corner of the density map (Figure 1), two density clusters (#2 and #5) are one of hot themes in this field. These two clusters adjacent to each other which have occupied 1/3 of the view area are highly related to this topic. Three intertwined nodes of “Ideological and Political Education”, “Ideological and Political Construction” and “Reforms of Ideological and Political Courses” are the most related and most similar in this hotspot. The main content is the rethinking of ideological and political education and construction after the emergence of the concept of curriculum-based ideological and political education. Among them, the reform of ideological and political courses is the first step, as scholars have heated discussions on the reform and repositioning of it. As a result, the definition of the essence of curriculum-based ideological and political education has become a hotspot in the early stage,

which also lays the foundation for the construction of curriculum ideological and political concepts. Based on the following explorations, other keywords such as “collaborative education mechanism”, “same-direction advance”, “ideological and political teachers” and “implicit education” have been highlighted in those two clusters. They are also the beginning of this hotspot to carry out researches on the construction of the ideological and political concept.

#### Hotspot 2: Research on values of curriculum-based ideological and political education

Research on values of curriculum-based ideological and political education and the first hotspot are almost developed at the same time. The research on values equals to its significance, which provides a theoretical basis of curriculum-based ideological and political construction. Only by clarifying the value can scholars point out the direction and aims for its construction. On the basis of literature surveys, current research on curriculum-based ideological and political education mainly focuses on the national and college levels. In addition, discussing the value of curriculum-based ideological and political education from the national level can be classified as an extension of the research on its connotation. It is also the definition of its conceptual extension. Similarly, the keyword clustering of national-level research appears in cluster 2 of the density map, such as “value guidance”, “Marxism” and “new era”, reflecting the value of curriculum ideological and political construction at the macro level. They are the demand for ideological and political education and the reinforcement of national education in the new era (H. Wang & B. Wang, 2018). The discussion on value at the college level is mainly from the fundamental tasks of higher education. The main high-frequency keywords involve “morality education”, “talent cultivation”, “education”, “new engineering”, “colleges”, “college students”, and “ideological and political education”. Among them, the centrality of morality education is greater than 0.1, indicating that this keyword is a turning point as curriculum-based ideological and political education is not only the requirement for the national development strategy, but also a fundamental problem and a task of education (X. Wang, 2019). As a result, curriculum-based ideological and political construction is based on the fundamental educational task of “morality education”, which also determines the role of this keyword as an important turning point. The college-level research in the density map is reflected in cluster 1 and cluster 4. As the most important research topic, cluster 1 has the most co-occurrence keywords, so the color is the deepest to show the high popularity. From the college level, the value of curriculum-based ideological and political education mainly focuses on the direction of education, talent cultivation, quality of education, ideological and political education, reforms of classroom teaching and so on. It is worth noting that there are two types of majors in two clusters, namely PE and foreign language. Although the co-occurrence frequency is not high, they are prominent among other majors, indicating that they are ahead of others in curriculum-based ideological and political education. Almost each college or university has the course of college PE. The biggest advantage of this type of compulsory course is that it has a wide range of students coupled with a flexible teaching mode, which is often the first choice for college teaching reforms. From the national level, the teaching reform of PE incorporating ideological and political elements is in line with the country's policy of further improvements in the comprehensive development and training system of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor. As for foreign language education, the integration of ideology and politics has its special significance in terms of foreign language talent cultivation and course contents. The mission of Chinese foreign language education in the new era is to cultivate talents who can write “a brand-new world history”. As foreign language involves both Chinese and Western cultures and the differences in values and outlook on life (Z. Wang, 2021), it is necessary to face Western ideology directly and carry out the appropriate guidance in which the brand-new curriculum-based ideological and political education has played an important role. Therefore, the value and significance of the ideological and political construction of foreign language majors are highlighted as well. Meanwhile, from those clusters, “foreign language major” is located in cluster 4 with “colleges” and “curriculum-based ideological and political education” as representative labels, to demonstrate the research focuses on the ideological and political education of foreign language students.

#### Hotspot 3: Exploration in paths of curriculum-based ideological and political education

Since June 2020, the Ministry of Education has issued policies to lead the curriculum -based ideological and political education into a stage of comprehensive practice. As a result, relevant research has also quickly focused on the exploration in paths of curriculum-based ideological and political education. From curriculum system to classroom teaching model, from college students to teachers, from teaching implementation to evaluation system, all purposes are to explore a suitable curriculum-based ideological and political path for a certain subject. Some scholars also pay attention to the research on differences in the process of curriculum-based ideological and political education and put forward suggestions based on different disciplines, different nature of universities and different levels of teaching objects (H. Wang & B. Wang, 2018). From the frequency and betweenness centrality centrality of keywords list in Table 1, the co-occurrence frequency of keywords, including “realization path”,

“ideological and political education”, and “professional curriculum system”, are lower than those high-frequency keywords in hotspot 1 and 2 due to the late appearance, but they are still one of the hotspots in this field. Whether these keywords are hot frontiers for the future research can be further verified through the subsequent timezone map and the analysis of mutation word. According to the density map, the exploration of curriculum-based ideological and political education mainly focuses on three clusters (#3, #6 and #7), of which cluster 7 is the most popular, but the number of co-occurring keywords is the least. It can be preliminarily judged that this research topic is relatively new but has great potential. Cluster 3, as a bridge, connects cluster 7 and cluster 6 in terms of position. These three clusters are interrelated research directions under the same topic. Judging from the co-occurrence keywords of them, cluster 3 and cluster 7 mainly study the strategy of curriculum-based ideological and political education in the new era, and the construction of teaching staff in the same direction, including how to reform traditional ideological and political courses so as to implement the tasks of ideological and political work in the new era. It is worth noting that the keyword “postgraduate” also appeared in cluster 3, indicating that the moral education of postgraduates has been paid attention and that they also have to attend ideological and political courses. Due to differences of training plan in curriculum system, teaching object and training method, the question that the curriculum-based ideological and political education of postgraduates can be copied from the undergraduates’ need a further discussion. The exploration of curriculum-based ideological and political construction for postgraduates is expected to become an emerging hotspot in the next few years. Cluster 6 is the landing research of all hotspots which takes the classroom as the main channel of curriculum-based ideological and political education as the starting point with the use of the case study method. It has put forward some practical teaching modes and methods through empirical research such as flipped classroom, and has started from multiple levels of students, teachers and colleges in order to reconstruct or optimize the curriculum system, to promote the curriculum-based ideological and political construction, and to realize the fundamental task of moral education.

Looking at three hotspots formed by the above 7 clusters, three themes have improved the research from the macro-level curriculum-based ideological and political concepts (connotation and value) to the micro-level exploration so as to realize a comprehensive and systematic research in this field. In other words, the research in this field has been initially shaped. However, in which directions will further development be made in the future? Or what new research hotspot will emerge? Then, its future development trend and frontier hotspots will be discussed through theme evolution and the analysis of mutation word.

### 3.2 Analysis of Research Frontiers

The timezone view of keyword co-occurrence in Figure 2 was generated with the help of CiteSpace so as to clearly show the evolution path and future trend of curriculum-based ideological and political research with the change of time. Then through detecting and analyzing mutation words, a list of 6 top citation bursts (Table 2) clearly demonstrates time and intensity.

On the whole, the direction in curriculum-based ideological and political education is based on the research of ideological and political courses and their educators in 2014. On the basis of them, some hotspots such as courses of ideological and political concepts, college ideological and political education, ideological and political construction, moral education, three-wide education, and collaborative education have been discussed. Therefore, the research on curriculum-based ideological and political education actually emerged in 2017, and then with the depth of research, new hotspots such as ideological and political elements, talent cultivation, college PE, and socialist core values have evolved accordingly.

Specifically, it can be found that the diachronic evolution of the ideological and political research topics of college courses has obvious stages from Figure 2. It can be roughly divided into three stages whose starting years of each stage are 2014, 2017, and 2019.

The first stage (2014-2016) mainly stayed at the level of theories whose themes were concentrated in 2014 when the reform of curriculum-based ideological and political education has been discussed, and the ideological and political curriculum and curriculum-based ideological and political education concepts have been clarified. It can be regarded as a preparation. In 2015, the research topics were relatively scattered, and more keywords appeared with a lower frequency. Due to the low frequency of keywords, there was a blank period in 2016, and no relatively concentrated research was formed in this year. According to the detection and analysis results of citation bursts in Table 2, keywords emerging in this period were “college ideological and political theory courses” and “excellent courses”, but due to the low frequency of words, they were only prominent in 2014 and appeared to be no further development. Therefore, it is no longer a research hotspot of the second stage.

In the second stage (2017-2018), the ideological and political construction and theoretical research were highlighted. At this stage, there were the four most emerging keywords all of which reflect the theoretical content

in line with the emergence and evolution of a certain field. Therefore, this stage is the beginning of the curriculum-based ideological and political education. The highest frequency of curriculum-based ideological and political education is also strong evidence.

In the third stage (2019-present), there are more and more topics and hotspots with the depth of research. As a result, keywords are accordingly increasing, but there are fewer keywords with high frequency. As several researches are all at the preliminary stage, no keywords have emerged. However, it is worth noting that the research at this stage began to focus on teaching practice, and combined with other majors and other courses to carry out reforms in curriculum-based ideological and political education generating some keywords including “PE”, “teaching staff” and “reforms of ideological and political courses”. In addition, others such as “curriculum-based ideological and political theory reform”, “ideological and political elements” and “Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era” appeared, which indicates that on the basis of teaching practice, it has combined with the relevant national policies in order to further improve the theoretical research on curriculum-based ideological and political education. All in all, the theoretical research is becoming more and more mature which will support and develop the ideological and political construction of higher education.

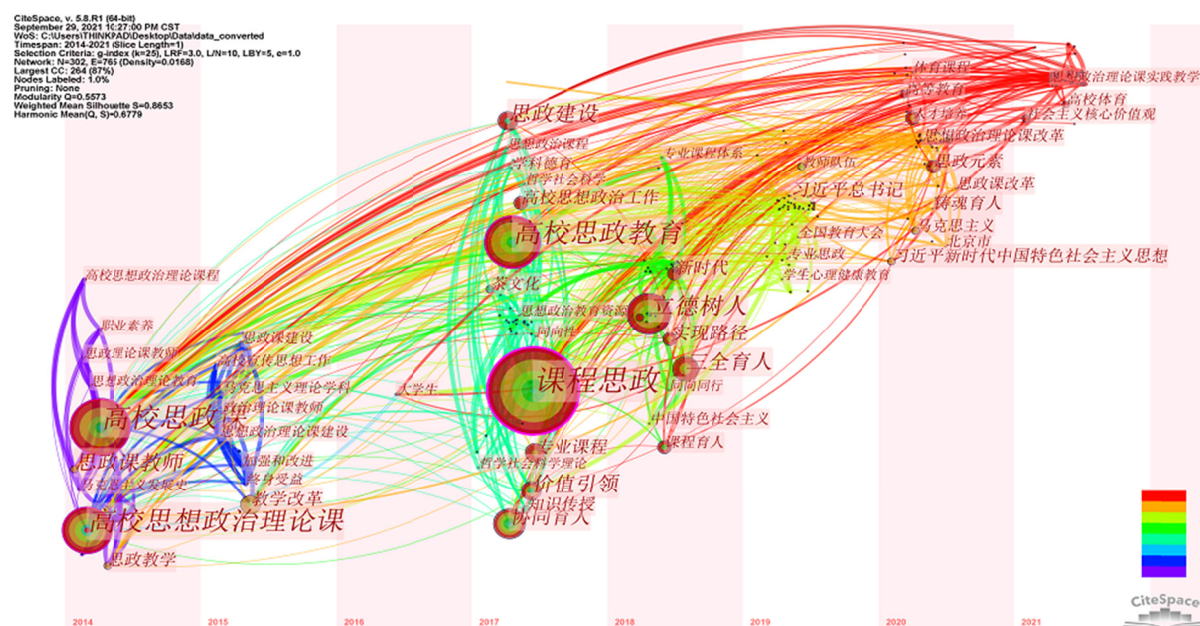


Figure 2. Map of keywords co-occurrence area based on CiteSpace

*Note.* All the data from CNKI are from the literatures in Chinese, so the keywords in Figure 2 from CiteSpace are all showed in Chinese.

Table 2. Top 6 keywords with the strongest citation bursts

| Keywords   | Year | Strenth | Begin | End  |
|--|------|---------|-------|------|
| college ideological and political theory courses | 2014 | 2.66    | 2014  | 2016 |
| excellent course                                 | 2014 | 1.29    | 2014  | 2015 |
| college ideological and political work           | 2014 | 1.95    | 2017  | 2019 |
| new era  | 2014 | 2.83    | 2018  | 2019 |
| timeliness                                       | 2014 | 1.63    | 2018  | 2019 |
| same-direction advance                           | 2014 | 1.22    | 2018  | 2019 |

#### 4. Conclusion

Using both literature analysis software of CiteSpace and VOSviewer, this paper has conducted visual analysis and information mining of relevant literature on curriculum-based ideological and political education in China and the

research has revealed the hotspots and development trends of it in the past eight years. The study finds that the curriculum-based ideological and political education in China is currently in the growth period with the increased amount of literature. It is worth noting that the interdisciplinary literature has increased rapidly, especially foreign languages and PE, as an attempt to carry out interdisciplinary research. According to the seven visual clusters, it can be concluded that hotspots focus on the definition of its connotation, construction value, and the exploration of practical paths. On the whole, the diachronic evolution of research themes has obviously shown several stages from the initial hotspots to hundreds of topics. Keywords, such as “ideological and political elements”, “talent cultivation”, “college PE” and “socialist core values”, are the current research frontiers fully reflecting the maturity of curriculum-based ideological and political education. It has basically completed basic theoretical research and will have a promising practice potential in the future. Under the guidance of higher education policies, researches will be separated into several major groups and institutions based on different hotspots and disciplines in the future, and the path will expand to practice with the guidance of theories. As a result, future multidisciplinary research can obtain more practical research results so as to complete the transformation from “micro ideological and political education” to “macro ideological and political education”. The ideological and political elements will be integrated into courses to combine moral education with general education, thus to achieve the fundamental goal of morality education and to promote the maximization of research in higher education.

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