Student Engagement: An Investigation into the Effectiveness of Teaching in Ideological and Political Theories Courses (IPTC) For Undergraduates in China-Based Higher Education

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Abstract—In the paper, the area of study is first defined by the authors that is an investigation into student engagement in Ideological and Political Theories Courses (IPTC) teaching for undergraduates in China-based higher education, detailing the aims of the proposed research project that is beneficial for China Dual "First-Class" universities development. Then, the authors outlined the three potential questions in the research according to the discipline facts and relevance of research based on the previous research they conducted in this field. Additionally, the research activities have been shown in the paper. Next, an indication of the approach to the research was provided and how they were shown in different parts of the study. Finally, in conclusion section, the comments have been made by the authors on the potential meaning for the IPTC effective teaching and also the limitation of the study is displayed.

Keywords—student engagement; effectiveness of teaching; ideological and political theories courses (IPTC); undergraduates; China-based; higher education

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of school engagement has attracted growing interest as a way to ameliorate low levels of academic achievement, high levels of student boredom and disaffection, and high dropout rates in the world [1-5]. Meanwhile, more and more researchers have combined the teaching effectiveness with student engagement [6-8]. In China, the effectiveness of teaching of Ideological Political and Theories Curriculum (IPTC) in Chinese higher education has increasingly become more and more important than ever [9-10]. Additionally, lots of

ways have been used to improve the IPTC teaching in educational field [11-12]. It made up of five courses in higher education, including An Outline of Fundamental Principles of Marxism (AOFPM); Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and the Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (IMZTTSSCC); Chinese Modern and Contemporary History (IMZTTSSCC); Ideological and Moral Education & Elements of Law (IMEEL) and Situation and Policy Education (SPE) [School of Marxism, 2016] [13]. In China, the TIPC has played an important and effective role to guide student (Yv, 2010) for a long time [14]. Researchers have listed four important aspects roles for the courses. In the first place, it is required that most Chinese undergraduates enrolled in college and university have to choose the courses and finish them in their whole higher education studies. In the second place, some Chinese official departments, like the Ministry of Education, have required related universities that guarantee IPTC as compulsory subjects position in the higher education. In the third place, IPTC has a special importance meaning in China, which was shown that its fundamental purpose is providing orientation for students, including help students form their understanding for the world and personal values [15]. And finally, China is planning to build "Dual-First" class universities in the country. (The State Council of the People's Republic of China [TSCPRC], 2015) [16]. From this point, IPTC will been given special status in the future. In other words, lecturers and researchers have to find more ways to improve the effectiveness of IPTC teaching and learning.

Researchers and lecturers in China have explored many different approaches and methods that impact on the effectiveness of IPTC (Li, 2013; Ai, 2014) in recent years [17-18].

Ai (2006) argued the nature of IPTC is achieving the aims of the curriculum [19]. Also, some researchers explained that IPTC is a kind of representation of ideology and behavior. Research from Zhang and Peng (2014) agreed that improving IPTC teaching methods was a critical strategy [20]. Some researchers maintain that student engagement is an inherent requirement for IPTC to be effective, (e.g. Tang, 2010) [21]. Meanwhile, students' cognitive engagement, effective engagement and behavioral engagement in IPTC have been discussed in research (Tang & Wu, 2010) [22]. However, criticisms of ineffectiveness on IPTC had been flourishing in the literature during past five years in China (see e.g. Wang, 2013; Shu, Xv & Qv; 2015) [23-24]. Therefore, the author has been involved in the learning of IPTC in China and has seen lots of young college students not interested in the learning of IPTC. At the same times, massive higher education reform keeps going in Chinese universities and China is building its Double First-class universities. This paper presents a unique opportunity for some highly relevant educational research to be carried out concurrently on how to make more students engaged in IPTC and improve its teaching and learning, as outlined below.

II. PROPOSED STUDY

While one of the main drivers for changing during past years at China's universities is policies from China government, the real effectiveness in the teaching of IPTC actually from the effective teaching and learning in universities. The proposed study for this research project is to track the uptake of student engagement in teaching adopted by five diverse courses taught at China's universities, taking into account the specific learning and teaching needs of the discipline involved and the level of acceptance of student engagement as a viable design approach at the start of the implementation. The study will then triangulate, chart and analyze any observed changes and collected data. The purpose of the study is to find answers to the following proposed research questions:

RQ1: How effectively are students engaged in the teaching of Ideological Political and Theories Courses (IPTC)?

RQ2: How and to what extent do Chinese undergraduates engage in the learning of IPTC, which includes the affective engagement, behavior engagement, cognitive engagement and agentic engagement?

A supplementary, related research question is also proposed:

SRQ: How can researchers, lecturers and even government more effectively engage students via affective engagement, behavior engagement, cognitive engagement and agentic engagement?

(For an outline of the research study plan and a suggested timeline for completion, please see Table I)

TABLE I.   PROPOSED RESEARCH PLAN

Step	Research activity
1	Develop an ethics study and obtain approval to conduct qualitative and quantitative research with identified universities in China.
2	Carry out a comprehensive review of the literature on student engagement in higher education settings and the effectiveness of IPTC in China.

	Cont. to TABLE I
3	Finalize a research study and present for university's approval and subsequent implementation.
4	Design a questionnaire for testing the student engagement.
5	Develop a specific definition of student engagement for IPTC, based on results obtained from the study, and generalize its application to the broader community.
6	Test the hypotheses by completing the questionnaire at over 20 universities.
7	Phenomenography interviews with students and staff at least 5 universities in Shaanxi Province.
8	Collecting Data; Develop a specific analysis of student engagement in IPTC China-based institutions, based on results obtained from the study, and generalize its application to the broader institution.
9	Write up and submit a thesis based on results of the literature review and study.

III. RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The research questions listed above are significant because they are informed by many researchers (Wang & Fan, 2016) who summarize the ineffectiveness of IPTC when lectures delivery their courses [25].

➢ Academic concerns on time limitations for introducing student engagement in IPTC
➢ Compulsory courses from government curriculum design give limited choices for students
➢ With talk and awareness of potential effects that Neoliberal Ideology brought on cognitive engagement, behavior engagement, the affection engagement, and agentic engagement
➢ Students concerns about the benefits and opportunities in short time drive them to spend less time and passion on the IPTC
➢ Limited awareness of diverse learning needs of students with different needs, and
➢ A lack of awareness of available student engagement assessment methods.

Recent literature reviews on student engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) references three dimensions to understand student engagement, i.e.: cognitive engagement, behavior engagement, and affective engagement [26]. For the purposes of this research, "What is student engagement?", is still complex and not clear. One research study reported an "Agency as a fourth aspect of students' engagement during learning activities (Reeve, J., Tseng, C, 2011), which gives the study more theory foundation to explore the student engagement in IPTC [27]. In conclusion, it is meaningful to understand the meaning of the student engagement for the IPTC.

According to the review of research for the effectiveness of IPTC (Wang, Fan& Zhang, 2016), there must be a data-based foundation for mearing the undergraduates who engaged in the IPTC if teachers and researchers would like to know how to improve the teaching and learning of IPTC [28]. In other words, the successful development of student engagement in IPTC will need to be based on empirical evidence and a solid theoretical model to have any real meaning.

In the real teaching context, it is strongly agreed that studying IPTC from a perspective of student engagement was a more effective and efficient way to enhance the learning

process. Research on student engagement in China began later than in other countries, originally appearing in the 1980s. The concept of student participation is a basic feature of modern education, which goes beyond the purely traditional educational view that merely values teacher knowledge and teaching methods.

The studies discussed above, and other relevant papers in this field that I reviewed, have informed this research by identifying gaps in the current understanding of the effectiveness in IPTC from the viewpoint of student engagement, which requires future research and will contributes to the building of a solid theoretical model for IPTC used in China-based higher education.

IV. RESEARCH APPROACH

It is expected that the research will contribute to a theoretical understanding of the definition of student engagement of IPTC, and how that might inform future researchers and lecturers effective teaching of IPTC practice at universities, programs and curriculum level, and most importantly, provide suggestions for China's educational government.

V. METHODS

Effectiveness research makes use of a broad range of methods for collecting and evaluating both qualitative and quantitative data [29]. Accordingly, the proposed study will use a mixed-methods approach; employing mainly IPTC–based questionnaires, pre and post-test assessments, phenomenography interviews, focus groups, participant observation, logbooks and document analysis. (See table for methods to be used and their purpose within the proposed research).

TABLE II. MIXED METHODS USE FOR DATA ACQUISITION IN THE PROPOSED STUDY

Method	Description	Purpose
Quantitative measures Questionnaires	A qualitative study of a condition of affective engagement, behavior engagement, cognitive engagement and agentic engagement of IPTC in China universities.	Explore attitudes to current practices, and determine current understanding of engagement in higher education.
Qualitative measures 1. Historical and document research	Analysis of all documentation surrounding student engagement implementation such as meeting notes, designs, drafts, and forum and wiki posts, etc.	Provides evidence of the processes followed and feedback received during the design and implementation phase, to inform re-design processes and hypothesis creation.
2. Phenomenography interviews	Individual student interviews	To test hypotheses regarding student experiences, engagement, retention and progression (RQ2), adding the emotional engagement for IPTC
	Staff interviews	To test hypotheses on academic resistance and gather attitudes to change.
3. Participant observation	Audit the units personally that delivery IPTC.	To observe all participants in the units, understanding the real process in order to gain insights into student engagement in IPTC.

Proposed reference sources will include international student engagement literature and studies for the effectiveness of IPTC in China references, and meta-level studies on student engagement in higher education such as those by Filseckera and Hickeyb (2014) and Christenson, Reschly, and Wylie (2011), and recent papers, journal articles and proceedings on phenomenography used in higher education [30-31]. In addition, student engagement publications will provide the necessary theoretical grounding for the proposed research, and some related phenomenography methodology publications will inform the measurement of effective engagement.

By adopting a phenomenography research approach, authors hope to derive a relational model of student engagement in IPTC that identifies and uses the aspects of the current models of student engagement. Further, it can give the feasible and reasonable suggestions for the IPTC's learning and teaching in the future as well as China's government.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the paper, the authors have demonstrated the meaning of research on student engagement in the effectiveness of teaching in Ideological and Political Theories Courses (IPTC) for undergraduates in China-based higher education. Also, the study's steps and methods are shown in the paper, which made the whole study look more reasonable. However, we have to acknowledge the research's limitation which may concern some approvals or permits that need for the project to be proceed, especially for quantitative measures. Another problem is some students may refuse to show their true ideas for side effect consideration.

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