

# Students' Perceptions on the Integration of Moral Education into a Content-Based English Drama Course

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**Abstract:** *This mixed-methods study investigated students' perceptions regarding the integration of moral education into a content-based English drama course in a Chinese higher education context. Anchored in the theoretical frameworks of Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL; Coyle, 2005; Meyer, 2013), the research employed a concurrent triangulation design combining quantitative survey data (N = 168) and qualitative semi-structured interviews (N = 28). Quantitative results revealed predominantly positive perceptions across three key dimensions: the effectiveness of after-class discussions in connecting moral lessons to dramatic texts (M = 4.02, SD = 0.72), the enhancement of moral understanding (M = 4.11, SD = 0.68), and the influence of the course on students' personal worldviews (M = 4.10, SD = 0.65), with all mean scores exceeding 4.0 on a 5-point Likert scale. Qualitative analysis, conducted through grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), identified three principal themes: Moral-Cognitive Development, Social-Interactive Learning, and Linguistic-Cultural Mediation. A consistent positive response differential of 12-17% favoring higher-proficiency students was observed, though chi-square analyses revealed no statistically significant differences across proficiency levels ( $p > .05$ ). The findings demonstrate that the deliberate integration of moral education through a CLIL approach, underpinned by social constructivist principles, constitutes an effective pedagogical paradigm that fosters both linguistic proficiency and ethical development, nurturing critically reflective and interculturally competent learners.*

**Keywords:** Moral education, Content-based instruction, CLIL, Social constructivism, English drama, Higher education, Mixed-methods research.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of global education, the integration of diverse curricular elements has become a prominent focus, aiming to foster holistic student development alongside academic proficiency. Among these integrative efforts, the incorporation of moral education into content-based English courses presents a unique pedagogical challenge and opportunity, particularly within higher education settings. This approach seeks not only to enhance English language acquisition but also to cultivate ethical reasoning and moral values, recognizing that language is not merely a tool for communication but also a vehicle for transmitting culture, values, and worldviews. Understanding students' perceptions of such integrated curricula is crucial, as their engagement, motivation, and ultimately the effectiveness of the educational endeavor are profoundly influenced by their subjective experiences and interpretations.

The teaching of English through drama offers a particularly rich context for moral education integration. Dramatic literature inherently explores ethical dilemmas, human conflicts, and moral choices, providing authentic materials that lend themselves to the examination of values such as justice, power, integrity, and responsibility. When students engage with plays such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* or Sophocles' *Antigone*, they encounter complex moral landscapes that can serve as catalysts for ethical reflection and discourse. However, the effectiveness of this integration depends largely on how students perceive and engage with the moral content embedded within their language learning experience.

Despite the theoretical robustness of frameworks such as Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL; Coyle, 2005; Meyer, 2013), a significant gap exists in the empirical literature concerning students' direct perceptions of moral education integration in content-based English courses. While these frameworks offer strong conceptual tools to understand how perceptions might be formed, there is a notable absence of studies specifically exploring the lived experiences and subjective interpretations of students in this unique integrated curriculum. The existing literature primarily addresses the definitions, benefits, and challenges of CLIL in general, or the theoretical underpinnings of social constructivism in broader educational contexts, without directly examining how students perceive the moral education component when it is delivered

through English in a content-based course.

To address this gap, the present study investigated students' perceptions of the integration of moral education into a content-based English drama course at a Chinese university. The course employed a blended teaching approach, combining online learning via the Chaoxing platform with face-to-face sessions, and incorporated moral education themes through the study of English dramatic works. The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) How do students perceive the effectiveness of after-class discussions in connecting moral lessons to dramatic texts?
- 2) To what extent do students believe the course enhanced their moral understanding and influenced their personal worldviews?
- 3) How does English language proficiency moderate students' perceptions of the moral education integration?
- 4) What themes emerge from students' qualitative accounts of their experiences with the integrated curriculum?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on content-language integration and moral education in foreign language contexts, offering empirical evidence to inform curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and future research directions.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section reviews the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the integration of moral education into content-based English courses. It first examines the foundational principles of Social Constructivism and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), then synthesizes their implications for understanding student perceptions in integrated curricula, and finally identifies the research gap that this study addresses.

### **2.1 Social Constructivism and Knowledge Construction**

Social constructivism, rooted in the work of Vygotsky (1978), represents a significant paradigm shift in educational thought, moving away from the notion of knowledge as a fixed entity to be transmitted toward an understanding of knowledge as actively constructed through social interaction and cultural mediation (Laroche et al., 1998; Palincsar, 1998; Saleem et al., 2021). The core tenet is that our understanding of the world, including moral principles and values, is not universally predetermined but is shaped through communal interchange and discourse (Galbin, 2014; Gergen, 1985).

A fundamental distinction within constructivism is drawn between cognitive constructivism, associated with Piaget, and social constructivism, rooted in Vygotsky's theories (Jafari Amineh & Davatgari Asl, 2015; Powell et al., 2014). While Piagetian constructivism emphasizes individual cognitive structures, Vygotsky's social constructivism highlights the crucial role of social interaction and language in shaping thought and knowledge. For Vygotsky, language is not merely a tool for expressing thoughts but is integral to the development of higher mental functions, with language preceding thinking in its developmental significance (Powell et al., 2014). This emphasis on language, communication, and discourse as central to the interactive process of comprehending the world is a pivotal aspect of social constructivism (Burr, 2015; Galbin, 2014).

The pedagogical implications of social constructivism are profound, advocating for a learner-centered and collaborative approach (Saleem et al., 2021). Teachers are repositioned as facilitators who create environments conducive to active knowledge construction, encouraging students to collaborate, share ideas, and build new understandings upon their existing knowledge (Kim, 2001). In the context of moral education in English courses, this framework suggests that students' perceptions are shaped by classroom interactions, linguistic challenges in expressing nuanced moral concepts, and cultural negotiation of moral content (Lombardo & Kantola, 2020).

### **2.2 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)**

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as a prominent pedagogical approach in foreign language education, particularly within European contexts, and has since gained global traction (Hemmi & Banegas, 2021; Ioannou Georgiou, 2012; Pokrive'akova et al., 2015). Coined in 1994 as a product of European multilingual policy, CLIL aims to equip citizens with proficiency in multiple languages to promote economic cooperation, adaptation to migration flows, and globalization (Hemmi & Banegas, 2021). At its core, CLIL involves teaching a curricular subject through the medium of a foreign language, requiring a dual focus on content

and language (Coyle, 2005; Mehisto, 2008).

Meyer (2013) introduced the CLIL-Pyramid and the 4Cs Framework as key strategies for CLIL planning and teaching. The 4Cs comprise Content (the subject matter, in this case moral education), Communication (using English to discuss and debate), Cognition (developing higher-order thinking skills), and Culture (fostering intercultural awareness). These components are crucial for understanding the holistic nature of CLIL, where content provides the subject matter, communication enables learning through interaction, cognition involves developing thinking skills, and culture fosters intercultural understanding.

Despite its potential, CLIL implementation presents challenges. Cenoz et al. (2014) highlighted that the core characteristics of CLIL are understood in different ways regarding the balance between language and content instruction. Mehisto (2008) identified difficulties arising from a lack of knowledge about CLIL-specific strategies, teacher belief systems, and the need for improved planning. Meyer (2013) noted the lack of appropriate teaching materials and the need for a comprehensive CLIL methodology. These challenges are particularly salient when dealing with a sensitive and abstract subject like moral education, which requires nuanced linguistic expression and cultural understanding.

### **2.3 Integration of Social Constructivism and CLIL**

The synergy between Social Constructivism and CLIL provides a powerful lens for understanding students' perceptions of moral education integration in English courses. CLIL offers the practical pedagogical framework for how content and language are integrated, while Social Constructivism provides the epistemological foundation for how students learn, construct meaning, and form perceptions within such an integrated environment (Palincsar, 1998).

CLIL's interactive methodologies, such as group debates and collaborative tasks, inherently align with social constructivism's emphasis on collaborative knowledge construction (Saleem et al., 2021). When students analyze moral dilemmas or ethical theories in English, they engage in complex cognitive processes mediated and enhanced by social interactions with peers and teachers. The role of language becomes particularly salient: English serves as both the medium of instruction and a scaffold for articulating ethical arguments (Andrews, 2012). Students' proficiency in English directly influences their ability to articulate moral reasoning, understand subtle ethical distinctions, and engage fully in discussions.

Furthermore, the Culture component of CLIL is especially relevant to moral education, as moral values are deeply embedded in cultural contexts. When moral education is delivered through English, students are exposed to potentially different cultural perspectives, which can broaden or challenge their existing moral frameworks (Hemmi & Banegas, 2021). The successful integration of moral education would therefore require careful adaptation to the students' specific cultural and educational context to foster positive perceptions.

### **2.4 Research Gap**

Despite the robust theoretical foundation provided by Social Constructivism and CLIL, a significant gap exists in the direct empirical investigation of students' perceptions on the integration of moral education into content-based English courses. The existing literature primarily focuses on the definitions, benefits, and challenges of CLIL in general, or the theoretical underpinnings of social constructivism in broader educational contexts. There is no direct empirical evidence specifically addressing how students perceive the moral education component when it is delivered through English in a content-based course. The present study aims to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence on students' perceptions of this specific curricular integration.

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Social Constructivism and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for understanding how students perceive the integration of moral education into content-based English courses in higher education. Social Constructivism provides the epistemological foundation for understanding how students actively build their understanding of moral concepts through social interaction, while CLIL offers the methodological paradigm for how such content and language integration is practically achieved.

### 3.1 Social Constructivism

Social constructivism, largely influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1978), posits that knowledge is actively constructed through social interaction, cultural mediation, and language (Palincsar, 1998). It represents a paradigm shift from the notion of knowledge as a fixed entity to be transmitted toward an understanding of knowledge as actively constructed through social interaction and cultural mediation (Larochelle et al., 1998; Saleem et al., 2021). Four key principles of this theory are particularly relevant to the present study.

#### 3.1.1 Knowledge as Socially Co-constructed

Learning occurs through collaborative meaning-making, where students negotiate understanding via dialogue and shared activities (Kim, 2001; Saleem et al., 2021). In moral education, this implies that ethical concepts are not passively absorbed but interpreted through peer discussions, debates, and teacher-guided reflection. Analyzing Shakespearean dilemmas in English becomes a collective process where students' perceptions are shaped by group dynamics and linguistic exchanges (Burr, 2015).

#### 3.1.2 Language as a Mediating Tool

Language is central to cognitive development and moral reasoning (Galbin, 2014). In this context, English serves dual roles: as the medium of instruction and as a scaffold for articulating ethical arguments. Students' ability to express nuanced moral ideas in a foreign language directly influences their engagement and perception of the integration's value (Andrews, 2012).

#### 3.1.3 Cultural and Prior Knowledge Embeddedness

Students filter moral content through their cultural backgrounds and pre-existing beliefs (Gergen, 1985). Discussions on concepts such as justice may evoke divergent interpretations across cultures, affecting perceptions of relevance (Risse, 2004). Social constructivism highlights how these subjective filters shape learning outcomes and the construction of moral understanding.

#### 3.1.4 Teacher as Facilitator

Instructors transition from knowledge transmitters to guides of collaborative learning (Saleem et al., 2021). Effective integration requires designing activities that foster the co-construction of moral understanding, aligning with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD; Palincsar, 1998). The teacher's role is to create opportunities for collaborative learning and discourse where students can actively engage with moral concepts, articulate their understandings in English, and collectively build their moral frameworks.

### 3.2 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL emerged as a prominent pedagogical approach in foreign language education, emphasizing dual-focused learning where subjects are taught through a foreign language (Coyle, 2005; Meyer, 2013). The core components of CLIL, adapted for the present study, are manifested through the 4Cs Framework.

#### 3.2.1 The 4Cs Framework

Meyer's (2013) 4Cs Framework comprises four interconnected components. Content refers to the moral education topics, such as ethical theories and dilemmas, that form the curricular focus. Communication involves students using English to discuss and debate moral issues, thereby enhancing language proficiency. Cognition encompasses the higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing ethical dilemmas, that are fostered through language-mediated tasks. Culture involves the integration of intercultural awareness, acknowledging the cultural specificity of moral values.

#### 3.2.2 Authentic and Contextualized Learning

CLIL emphasizes real-world applications and authentic materials to enhance engagement (Coyle, 2005). Students perceive integration positively when content feels relevant to their lives, such as linking moral dilemmas in dramatic works to contemporary ethical issues. This authenticity is crucial for fostering meaningful engagement

with both the moral content and the English language.

### **3.3 Integration of Frameworks**

The synergy between Social Constructivism and CLIL explains how students perceive moral education in English courses through three interconnected mechanisms. First, active meaning-making occurs as CLIL's interactive methodologies align with social constructivism's emphasis on collaborative knowledge construction (Palincsar, 1998). Second, linguistic and cultural mediation means that English proficiency influences students' ability to engage with moral content, while the Culture element in CLIL highlights how moral values are culturally embedded (Hemmi & Banegas, 2021). Third, pedagogical implications require teachers to design activities that scaffold language, foster intercultural dialogue, and balance cognitive and linguistic demands (Meyer, 2013).

In summary, Social Constructivism elucidates the process of moral knowledge co-construction, while CLIL provides the pedagogical design for integration. Students' perceptions are shaped by social interaction through peer and teacher dialogues, linguistic mediation through English proficiency, and cultural alignment through content relevance.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Research Design**

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative questionnaire data and qualitative interview responses to comprehensively investigate students' perceptions of moral education integration in content-based English courses. The concurrent triangulation design was informed by social constructivist principles (Vygotsky, 1978) and CLIL methodology (Coyle, 2005), emphasizing the socially constructed nature of learning experiences in bilingual educational contexts. This approach allowed for the collection and analysis of both numerical data capturing the breadth of student perceptions and narrative data providing depth and contextual understanding (Creswell, 2014).

### **4.2 Participants**

The study involved two participant groups. For the quantitative phase, all students enrolled in the integrated English drama and moral education course completed the online questionnaire (N = 168), representing a 100% response rate. For the qualitative phase, 28 students were selected through stratified random sampling based on final exam performance to ensure representation across three proficiency levels: lower proficiency (n = 9, final scores below 60%), medium proficiency (n = 10, final scores 60-80%), and advanced proficiency (n = 9, final scores above 80%).

### **4.3 Data Collection**

#### **4.3.1 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was administered electronically via Wenjuanxing, an online Chinese survey platform, at the conclusion of the course. It comprised 13 items organized into four sections: general feedback on the blended teaching approach, learning effectiveness, impact on personal growth, and open-ended suggestions. Three key questions (Q7-Q9) were directly relevant to moral education integration and formed the focus of the quantitative analysis: Q7 assessed the effectiveness of after-class discussions in connecting moral lessons to plays; Q8 measured the perceived development of moral understanding through the course; and Q9 evaluated the impact of the course on personal worldview and philosophy. All closed-ended items utilized 5-point Likert scales (1 = Very Ineffective to 5 = Very Effective). The questionnaire also gathered data on students' satisfaction with the blended teaching approach, ease of accessing materials on the Chaoxing platform, effectiveness of AI-assisted quizzes, and quality of face-to-face sessions.

#### **4.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Chinese to facilitate in-depth responses and minimize language barriers during data collection. Three core questions addressed: (a) how the integrated moral education themes influenced students' understanding of drama, with a request for a specific example of an inspiring moral dilemma;

(b) whether moral or philosophical issues in the Chaoxing post-class discussions challenged or impressed them, and how these discussions shaped their views; and (c) whether the course successfully integrated moral education with the academic study of English drama, and how this approach affected their personal growth and worldview. Interviews averaged 35 minutes in duration (range: 25-50 minutes) and were audio-recorded with participant consent.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

##### **4.4.1 Quantitative Analysis**

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and 95% confidence intervals, were computed for the Likert-scale responses. Cross-tabulation by proficiency level was conducted to examine potential differences across ability groups. Chi-square tests of independence were performed to assess whether proficiency-level differences were statistically significant. All statistical analyses were conducted with a significance level set at  $p < .05$ .

##### **4.4.2 Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) with three coding phases. Open coding identified 78 initial codes through line-by-line analysis of interview transcripts. Axial coding grouped these codes into 12 conceptual categories. Selective coding developed four core theoretical themes. The analysis followed a bilingual process: initial coding was conducted in Chinese, theme development was carried out in English, and back-translation verification ensured accuracy. Member checking was conducted with 20% of interviewees to enhance credibility, and the analytical process was documented through an audit trail to support dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### **4.5 Ethical Considerations**

The study was approved by the University Ethics Committee (Ref: #2023-EDU-015). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participant anonymity was ensured through pseudonyms (e.g., S01-L, S02-M, S03-A, indicating student number and proficiency level). All data were stored on password-protected university servers. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

#### **4.6 Methodological Limitations**

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on self-report data in both the questionnaire and interviews may introduce social desirability bias. Second, the findings are context-specific and may have limited generalizability beyond similar educational settings in Chinese higher education. Third, the cross-language analysis process, despite employing back-translation verification, may introduce subtle translation nuances. Finally, time constraints limited the duration of interviews, potentially restricting the depth of qualitative data collected.

### **5. FINDINGS**

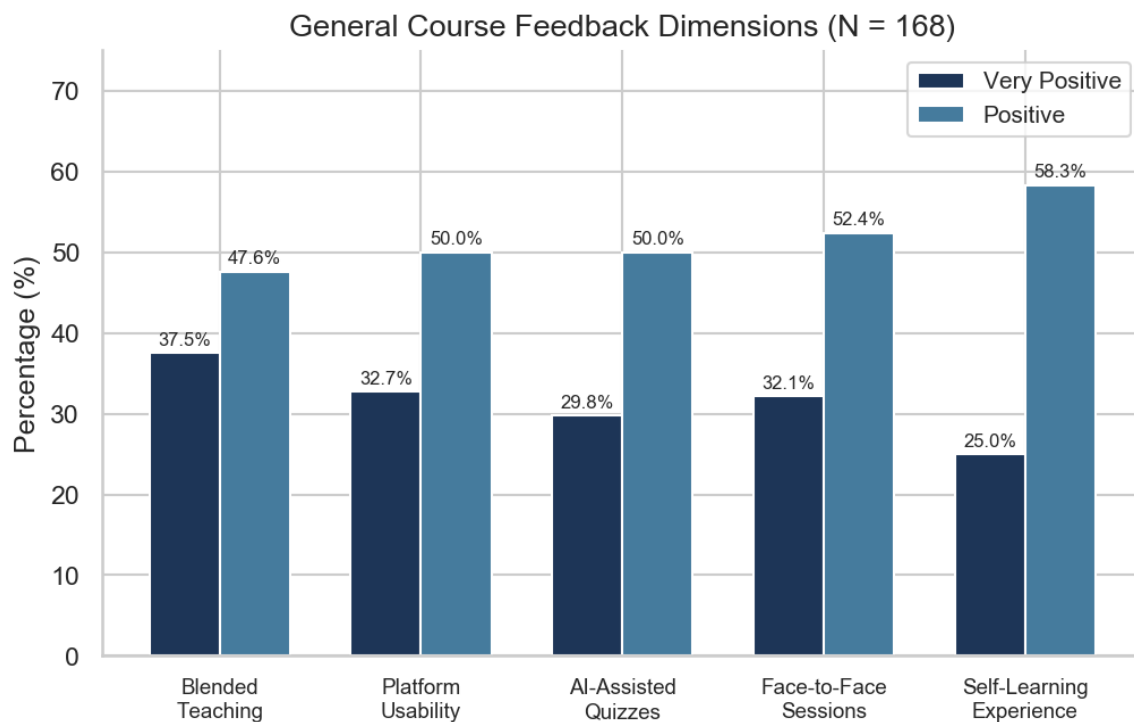
This section presents the findings from both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. The quantitative analysis focuses on three key dimensions of students' perceptions: the effectiveness of after-class discussions in linking moral lessons to dramatic works (Q7), the development of moral understanding (Q8), and the impact on worldview and life philosophy (Q9). The qualitative analysis presents three principal themes identified through grounded theory coding.

#### **5.1 Quantitative Findings**

##### **5.1.1 Overall Course Satisfaction**

The broader questionnaire data revealed high levels of satisfaction with the course design. For the blended teaching approach combining online and face-to-face instruction, 85.12% of respondents reported satisfaction (37.5% Very Satisfied, 47.62% Satisfied), while only 1.2% expressed dissatisfaction. Similarly, 82.74% rated the

ease of accessing learning materials on the Chaoxing platform as good or excellent, 79.76% found the AI-assisted quizzes effective in checking pre-learning understanding, and 84.52% expressed satisfaction with the quality of face-to-face sessions. These results indicate a generally positive reception of the course infrastructure that supported the moral education integration.



**Figure 1:** General course feedback across five dimensions (N = 168).

#### 5.1.2 Effectiveness of After-Class Discussions (Q7)

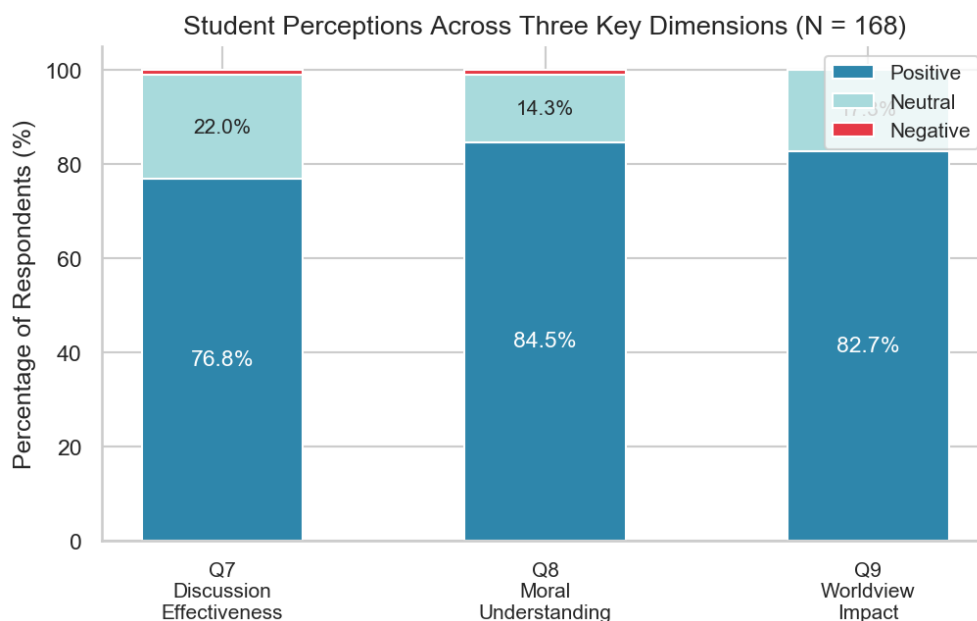
A majority of respondents (76.79%) expressed a positive perception of the after-class discussion format, with 26.19% rating it as Very Effective and 50.6% as Effective. Meanwhile, 22.02% of participants maintained a neutral stance, and only 1.19% perceived the format as Ineffective. Notably, no respondents reported it as Very Ineffective. The mean score was 4.02 (SD = 0.72) on a 5-point scale, with a mode of 4 (Effective) and a skewness of -0.83, indicating a left-skewed distribution with a pronounced positive tendency. These results suggest that the after-class discussions effectively integrated dramatic content with moral education, consistent with the principles of Social Constructivism, which posit that peer interaction and guided dialogue enhance deeper comprehension (Vygotsky, 1978).

#### 5.1.3 Development of Moral Understanding (Q8)

The data revealed a predominantly positive impact on moral understanding, with 84.52% of respondents indicating favorable outcomes (27.38% Very Well, 57.14% Well). Neutral responses accounted for 14.29%, while negative perceptions were minimal at 1.19%, with no participants selecting Very Poorly. The mean score was 4.11 (SD = 0.68), with a mode of 4 (Well) and a kurtosis value of 2.34, suggesting a leptokurtic distribution indicative of strong consensus among participants. These results suggest substantial perceived effectiveness in the implementation of moral education, with the CLIL methodology successfully facilitating moral learning through the integration of English drama content.

#### 5.1.4 Impact on Worldview and Life Philosophy (Q9)

A substantial majority of respondents (82.74%) reported a positive impact on their worldview, with 26.79% indicating strong agreement and 55.95% agreement. Meanwhile, 17.26% maintained a neutral position, and no participants expressed disagreement. The mean response was 4.10 (SD = 0.65), with a median of 4 (Agree) and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 3.99 to 4.21. The complete absence of dissenting views underscores the universal recognition of the moral education component as beneficial to personal growth, demonstrating the effective attainment of transformative learning goals.



**Figure 2:** Distribution of student perceptions across three key dimensions.

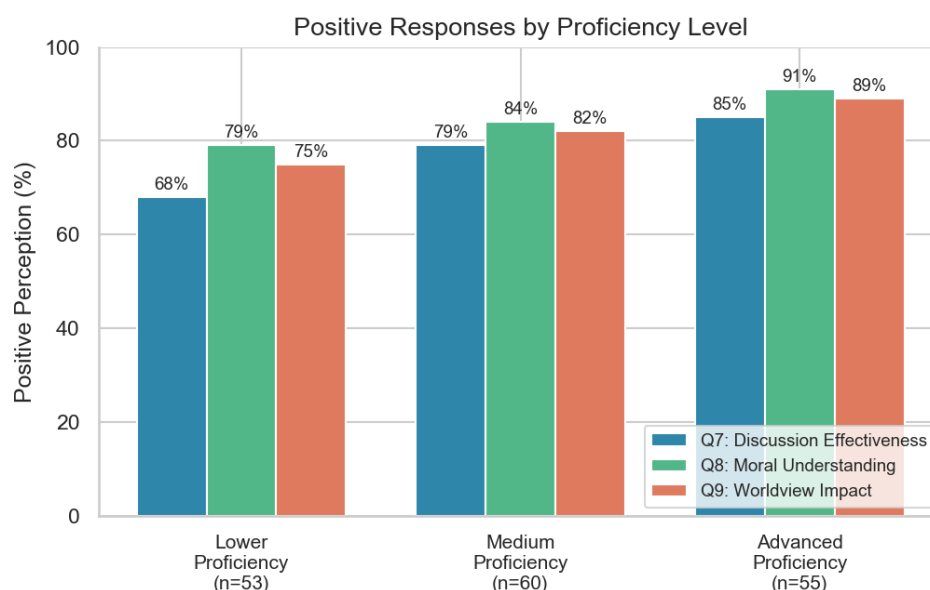
#### 5.1.5 Comparative Analysis Across Dimensions

The data indicated consistently high levels of effectiveness across all three measured dimensions, with mean scores exceeding 4.0. The most pronounced effect was observed in the development of moral understanding (Q8,  $M = 4.11$ ), followed by the impact on worldview (Q9,  $M = 4.10$ ), and the effectiveness of discussions (Q7,  $M = 4.02$ ). Table 1 summarizes these findings.

**Table 1:** Summary of Quantitative Findings Across Three Key Dimensions (N = 168)

| Metric       | Q7: Discussions | Q8: Moral Understanding | Q9: Worldview |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Positive (%) | 76.79%          | 84.52%                  | 82.74%        |
| Neutral (%)  | 22.02%          | 14.29%                  | 17.26%        |
| Negative (%) | 1.19%           | 1.19%                   | 0.00%         |
| Mean         | 4.02            | 4.11                    | 4.10          |
| SD           | 0.72            | 0.68                    | 0.65          |
| 95% CI       | [3.91, 4.13]    | [4.01, 4.21]            | [3.99, 4.21]  |

#### 5.1.6 Proficiency-Level Analysis



**Figure 3:** Positive perception rates by proficiency level across three dimensions.

Analysis of responses by proficiency level revealed a consistent positive response differential ranging from 12% to 17% favoring students with higher language proficiency. Lower-proficiency students ( $n = 53$ ) reported 68% positive perceptions for Q7, 79% for Q8, and 75% for Q9, compared to advanced-proficiency students ( $n = 55$ ) who reported 85%, 91%, and 89%, respectively. All groups exhibited positive-to-neutral response ratios exceeding 2:1. However, chi-square tests for proficiency-level differences were non-significant ( $p > .05$ ), suggesting consistent perceived effectiveness across ability levels despite the observed trend.

## 5.2 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis, conducted through grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), yielded three principal themes that illuminate students' perceptions of the moral education integration. Each theme is discussed below with supporting evidence from the interview data.

### 5.2.1 Theme 1: Moral-Cognitive Development

Students articulated that examining the decisions made by characters in diverse theatrical works enhanced their capacity for ethical evaluation and moral reasoning. This theme aligns with the Content and Cognition components of the CLIL 4Cs Framework. One student (S1) reflected on the study of *Macbeth*:

*Taking Shakespeare's Macbeth as an example, from the perspective of moral education, this theme reminds us that power must be restrained. It enlightens us to uphold moral principles in real life, resist negative temptations, and maintain the goodness and integrity of human nature. Through the integration of this ideological education, my understanding of the play is no longer limited to its surface plot and character development, but I am able to draw profound insights applicable to real life, enhancing my moral awareness and cultural literacy.*

Another student (S8) noted how the theme of ideological and political education deepened understanding of the play: "In particular, the theme of power and morality is very thought-provoking. *Macbeth's* willingness to murder Duncan in pursuit of the throne has prompted me to reflect on the conflict between the desire for power and moral conscience." This engagement with ethical conflicts in dramatic texts evidences comprehension of content objectives aligned with the CLIL framework.

### 5.2.2 Theme 2: Social-Interactive Learning

Group discussions and collaborative activities were integral to students' learning experiences, reflecting the principles of Social Constructivism, which emphasizes the importance of collaborative learning (Kim, 2001; Saleem et al., 2021). Student S19 articulated the significance of interactive exchanges:

*In the after-class discussions on Chaoxing, the conversations about the moral dilemmas and philosophical issues in Macbeth challenged me deeply and left a strong impression. Through these discussions, I gained a deeper understanding that everyone needs to make wise decisions when confronted with conflicts between morality and desire. These conversations not only enhanced my comprehension of the play but also made me more mindful of moral and ethical considerations in daily life, teaching me to make the right decisions in complex situations.*

The teacher's role as a facilitator was also highlighted. Participant S8 characterized the teacher as a facilitator of collaborative learning, noting that "the teacher designed activities that encouraged students to engage in discussions and critical thinking about moral behaviors in the dramas," which aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development. Advanced cognitive engagement was demonstrated through critical analyses, as illustrated by S18's examination of *A Streetcar Named Desire*: "It has enhanced my literary appreciation and moral judgment, promoted personal growth, enabled me to make more composed decisions when facing real-life issues, and broadened my worldview."

### 5.2.3 Theme 3: Linguistic-Cultural Mediation

Students' engagement with moral education content was substantially affected by their proficiency in English and their prior cultural knowledge. This theme highlights the Communication and Culture components of the CLIL framework. Students S5, S20, and S28 emphasized the influence of cultural contexts, such as those presented in *The Emperor Jones*, in shaping their moral interpretations. S28 commented that "discussing justice may evoke different interpretations in various cultures, affecting the perception of its relevance."

Comparative cross-cultural reflections were also observed, notably in S12's interpretation of Hamlet: "It encouraged me to examine moral issues from the perspectives of different cultural and social backgrounds, enhancing cross-cultural understanding and respect. By comparing the moral concepts and value orientations in various dramatic works, I became more open to embracing diversity and learned to think critically in the context of globalization." However, some students with lower language proficiency reported difficulties fully engaging in complex moral debates due to linguistic constraints, underscoring the need for targeted scaffolding strategies.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

The results of this study provide strong evidence supporting the effective incorporation of moral education within a content-based English drama course, as perceived by the student participants. Both quantitative and qualitative data converge to depict a pedagogical approach that not only meets its intended objectives but also resonates profoundly with students on a personal and transformative level. This section interprets the findings through the lens of the established theoretical frameworks while considering their broader implications and the subtle variations in student experiences.

### **6.1 Predominantly Positive Perceptions and Theoretical Consistency**

The predominantly positive quantitative outcomes across three key dimensions (effectiveness of discussions, enhancement of moral understanding, and influence on worldview) strongly indicate that the course design was highly successful. The elevated mean scores, all exceeding 4.0 on a 5-point scale, suggest that the majority of students perceived substantial value in the moral education component.

These findings align closely with the principles of Social Constructivism. The high ratings for post-class discussions highlight the essential role of peer interaction and guided dialogue in the construction of knowledge. Consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) theory, social interaction emerged as a critical catalyst for cognitive development. Student interview data, including accounts of collaborative analyses of Macbeth and Antigone, confirmed that moral understanding was co-constructed socially. Rather than passively receiving moral instruction, students actively engaged in building and refining their ethical comprehension through dialogue, negotiating complex moral concepts with peers and the instructor. The teacher's function as a facilitator, rather than an authoritative figure, was instrumental in fostering this environment, effectively operationalizing the Zone of Proximal Development.

Moreover, the data substantiate the application of the CLIL 4Cs Framework. The integration succeeded because it addressed all four components: Content, as students engaged deeply with significant moral themes such as power and morality in Macbeth; Communication, as English was employed authentically as a medium for discussing and reasoning about these themes; Cognition, as activities stimulated higher-order cognitive processes including ethical evaluation and critical analysis; and Culture, as students exhibited increased cross-cultural awareness by comparing moral concepts across diverse contexts. This synergistic implementation of Social Constructivism and CLIL fostered a learning environment in which language acquisition and moral development were mutually reinforcing.

### **6.2 Proficiency as a Moderating Factor**

An important observation is the consistent positive response differential of 12-17% favoring students with higher language proficiency levels. Although all proficiency groups reported overall positive experiences, and chi-square analyses revealed no statistically significant negative disparities, this pattern suggests that linguistic challenges may somewhat diminish the perceived effectiveness of moral education integration. This finding underscores the need for targeted scaffolding strategies to support learners with lower proficiency, ensuring equitable access to the moral and linguistic benefits of the course.

This finding corresponds with the qualitative theme of Linguistic-Cultural Mediation, wherein some students with lower language proficiency reported difficulties fully engaging in complex moral debates due to linguistic constraints. The cognitive demands of simultaneously processing advanced language and intricate moral content may be substantial for certain learners. Consequently, it is imperative to enhance scaffolding strategies, such as providing pre-taught vocabulary lists, sentence frames for discussion, and structured debate formats, to increase the accessibility of both moral and linguistic content. Such measures would promote equitable engagement and learning outcomes across varying proficiency levels, consistent with the principles outlined in Meyer's (2013)

CLIL pyramid.

### **6.3 The Transformative Effect and the Neutral Cohort**

The most pronounced impact was observed in students' moral understanding (Q8), with a notably complete absence of strong disagreement regarding the course's influence on worldview (Q9). This suggests the course effectively facilitated transformative learning experiences. Students not only acquired knowledge about morality but also engaged in reflective processes concerning their personal values and life philosophies, as evidenced by interview excerpts indicating that the course enabled them to make more composed decisions in real-life situations.

Nevertheless, the persistent presence of a neutral cohort, comprising 14-22% of respondents across all questions, merits further consideration. This subgroup likely includes students who did not perceive a significant impact, lacked sufficient linguistic resources to fully articulate or engage with the material, or exhibited lower receptivity to the integrative pedagogical model. This phenomenon underscores the need for targeted qualitative investigations to elucidate the underlying factors contributing to their neutral responses, whether these arise from linguistic challenges, pedagogical preferences, or a discordance between the moral content and individual belief systems.

## **7. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore students' perceptions regarding the incorporation of moral education within a content-based English drama course. Anchored in the integrative theoretical frameworks of Social Constructivism and CLIL, the findings provide compelling evidence that such pedagogical integration is both practicable and highly effective. Employing a mixed-methods design combining quantitative surveys (N = 168) with qualitative interviews (N = 28), the research consistently demonstrated that a substantial majority of students held favorable views toward the integration across all evaluated dimensions.

Quantitative results indicated notably positive perceptions, with mean scores exceeding 4.0 out of 5.0 for items assessing the effectiveness of discussions in connecting moral lessons to dramatic texts, the enhancement of moral understanding, and the influence of the course on students' personal worldviews. The qualitative analysis further distilled these outcomes into three principal themes: Moral-Cognitive Development, Social-Interactive Learning, and Linguistic-Cultural Mediation. Student narratives vividly illustrated how collaborative dialogues centered on plays such as *Macbeth* and *Antigone* functioned as catalysts for ethical reasoning while concurrently advancing English language proficiency, exemplifying a successful enactment of CLIL's 4Cs Framework within a social constructivist learning environment.

In summary, the evidence confirms that students perceive the integration of moral education not as a fragmented or extraneous component but as an enriching and transformative aspect of their language learning experience. The findings robustly support the assertion that a CLIL approach, underpinned by social constructivist principles, offers an optimal pedagogical structure for fostering holistic development, enabling learners to collaboratively construct moral knowledge and refine their worldviews through the medium of English.

### **7.2 Implications for Pedagogical Practice**

The outcomes of this research bear important implications for instructional practice and curriculum development. Three key areas of implication emerge.

#### **7.2.1 Enhanced Scaffolding**

The observed positive response differential of 12-17% across proficiency levels, although not statistically significant, highlights the necessity for differentiated instructional strategies. Educators are encouraged to implement targeted linguistic scaffolding measures, such as pre-teaching moral vocabulary, providing sentence frames to support ethical argumentation, and designing structured debate formats. These approaches will facilitate equitable engagement in moral discourse among students of varying language proficiencies, aligning with recommendations derived from Meyer's (2013) CLIL pyramid model.

### 7.2.2 Facilitator Training

Given the pivotal role of the instructor as a facilitator of collaborative learning rather than a mere knowledge transmitter, professional development programs should emphasize equipping teachers with strategies to design activities aligned with the Zone of Proximal Development (Palincsar, 1998). Such training should focus on fostering peer dialogue and guiding moral reasoning processes without imposing prescriptive viewpoints.

### 7.2.3 Culturally Responsive Content Selection

The theme of Linguistic-Cultural Mediation underscores the impact of students' cultural backgrounds on their engagement with course materials. Curriculum designers should prioritize the selection of dramatic works that embody universal moral themes, such as justice, power, and integrity, that are amenable to diverse cultural interpretations. This approach promotes inclusivity and enables students to connect their own cultural contexts with those represented in the texts.

## 7.3 Implications for Curriculum Design

The predominantly favorable student perceptions reported in this study substantiate the overall effectiveness of the integrated moral education model. The positive outcomes observed from after-class discussions on platforms such as Chaoxing underscore the importance of implementing structured yet adaptable interactive formats within the curriculum. Curriculum developers are encouraged to formally incorporate collaborative activities that are underpinned by explicit linguistic and conceptual objectives to enhance learning efficacy.

The consistent presence of a neutral response group, ranging from 14% to 22% across various questions, suggests the necessity for continuous curriculum refinement. Instituting systematic feedback processes, including anonymous mid-course evaluations, can enable educators to promptly identify and address areas of confusion or disengagement. Furthermore, the most significant influence noted was on students' worldview development, suggesting that curriculum advocacy should emphasize this transformative aspect of personal growth alongside conventional language acquisition goals.

## 7.4 Implications for Future Research

This study offers compelling evidence supporting the immediate effectiveness of incorporating moral education within a CLIL and social constructivist framework. However, it also highlights important avenues for future research. First, subsequent qualitative investigations should focus on students who expressed neutral perceptions to elucidate underlying factors, determining whether neutrality arises from linguistic challenges, pedagogical preferences, or a discordance between moral content and individual belief systems. Second, longitudinal studies are warranted to evaluate the sustained effectiveness of this integrative approach, monitoring the retention of moral reasoning abilities and advanced language skills over time. Third, given that the current study concentrated on an English drama course, future research should examine the applicability and efficacy of the integrated Social Constructivism-CLIL framework across other content-based English courses, such as history or environmental science, to assess its generalizability.

In summary, this study illustrates that the deliberate integration of moral education via a CLIL and social constructivist approach constitutes a potent educational paradigm. This approach transcends mere linguistic proficiency to nurture ethically conscious, interculturally competent, and critically reflective global citizens. The findings advocate for a dedicated transformation in pedagogical strategies and curriculum design toward holistic, dialogic, and scaffolded learning environments.

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