Problems and Countermeasures of College Teachers' Professional Ethics Cultivation

Yanmin Chen

Hainan Vocational College of Foreign Languages, Wenchang 571321, Hainan, China

Abstract: University faculty members bear the mission of "cultivating virtue and nurturing talent," with their professional ethics serving as a critical determinant of educational quality. While current ethical standards show positive trends, the challenges posed by digital transformation and intelligent development have heightened the urgency to enhance teachers' professional integrity. To address these challenges, comprehensive strategies should be implemented through fostering a virtuous ethical ecosystem, strengthening oversight mechanisms, and optimizing evaluation systems. By integrating institutional safeguards, educational guidance, and personal commitment, this approach will help faculty solidify ethical foundations and better fulfill their mission in modern education.

Keywords: University teachers; Professional ethics; Professional ethics cultivation

1. Introduction

The General Secretary emphasized: "Teachers bear the historic mission of disseminating knowledge, ideas, and truth, as well as shaping souls, lives, and new generations." This profound statement not only underscores the pivotal role of the teaching profession in modern society but also highlights the critical importance of teachers' professional ethics in fulfilling this mission. University educators not only impart knowledge and conduct academic research, but also shoulder the fundamental responsibility of "cultivating virtue and nurturing talent." The level of their professional ethics directly determines the quality of talent development in higher education. While China's academic community has shown positive progress in professional ethics, emerging challenges like the rapid advancement of digital technologies and the digital transformation era—where academic authenticity becomes harder to verify and online teaching ethics blur boundaries—require higher standards. Therefore, systematically cultivating and continuously enhancing teachers' professional ethics has become a crucial prerequisite and core foundation for implementing the fundamental mission of "cultivating virtue and nurturing talent."

2. The core problems of professional ethics cultivation of college teachers

2.1. Weakening of educational responsibilities

The mission of "cultivating virtue and nurturing talent" is the core responsibility of higher education institutions. However, the multifaceted professional identity of university faculty significantly complicates the cultivation of professional ethics, particularly evident in the tendency to "emphasize form over substance and superficiality over depth." Unlike elementary school teachers who primarily focus on instruction, university educators shoulder multiple responsibilities and social roles [1]. This complex identity integration not only deeply intertwines with their core teaching duties but also serves as a crucial pathway for professional advancement. When evaluation standards for academic integrity overly prioritize quantifiable and utilitarian outcomes, the resulting distraction inevitably diverts faculty time, energy, and resources from their primary educational mission, exacerbating the trend of prioritizing "scholarship" over "nurturing talent" [2,3].

In terms of teaching commitment: Some university faculty, burdened by research metrics, disciplinary development mandates, and social responsibilities, prioritize project applications and academic publications to meet promotion requirements. They often neglect course design, classroom interaction, and student feedback, even resorting to "rote teaching" and "perfunctory instruction," completely overlooking the pivotal role of education as a vehicle for nurturing students. Regarding educational philosophy, the fragmented responsibilities from multiple roles lead teachers to overlook value cultivation, focusing solely on academic performance to meet disciplinary demands while neglecting students' psychological well-being and developmental challenges, thus failing to fulfill their educational duties [4]. In teacher-student communication, excessive time spent on research, administrative tasks, and social engagements reduces post-class interactions to academic matters, lacking guidance on career planning and life decisions. Under pressures from balancing teaching and research, knowledge and authority, graduation and employment, teacher-student relationships become distorted, fostering one-sided dependence among students. The "teacher" role has shifted from "guide" to "knowledge transmitter" [5].

2.2. Violation of academic ethics

Academic integrity constitutes the fundamental ethical baseline for university faculty. However, the recent surge in academic misconduct incidents not only violates academic ethics but also severely undermines public trust in academia [6]. The widespread application of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has further exacerbated risks of ethical violations. While traditional misconduct has already disrupted the academic ecosystem, AI's involvement has compounded the challenges: beyond the difficulty of accurately identifying AI-generated content through detection systems, AI itself can produce fabricated information. Even when employing long-chain reasoning to demonstrate step-by-step logical processes, these seemingly rigorous derivations may still conceal errors. Such false content may stem from malicious user manipulation or inherent limitations of AI models. Driven by both human factors and technological constraints, this situation has significantly increased the difficulty of addressing academic ethical violations [7].

On one hand, academic misconduct manifests through fabricated experimental data, manipulated research findings, and plagiarism (including academic paper theft and idea appropriation), even evolving into industrialized violations like "ghostwriting services" and "paper trading." Some researchers even employ AI to generate fabricated data or complete papers, using technical means to conceal fraudulent traces. On the other hand, academic restlessness emerges when faculty members, driven by short-term academic gains, blindly chase trending research fields without rigorous academic integrity. This leads to the "quantity over quality" trap, with some resorting to unethical practices to secure research resources. The convenience of AI-generated content may further exacerbate this tendency toward rushed achievements and disregard for

academic quality, thereby posing new challenges to academic integrity and accountability.

2.3. Formalization of teacher ethics assessment

Due to insufficient resources, such as moral monitoring technology and professional personnel, many universities rely heavily on government and education authorities for organizing, guiding, and supporting teacher ethics monitoring activities. This heavy dependence on higher-level departments has indirectly led to the widespread formalization of teacher ethics evaluations in universities, resulting in frequent violations of professional ethics in recent years. Many such violations are difficult for universities to detect through internal monitoring and often only come to light after media exposure. Typical cases include teachers engaging in improper relationships with female students during marriage, illegally accepting bribes from suppliers, or exhibiting discriminatory attitudes and unethical conduct [8]. The concentration of these issues highlights the urgent need for universities to optimize their ethics evaluation mechanisms and strengthen their independent monitoring capabilities.

On one hand, the evaluation criteria for university faculty's moral cultivation remain ambiguous. Current assessments predominantly rely on qualitative judgments like "qualified or unqualified," lacking concrete quantifiable metrics such as student satisfaction, educational outcomes, and academic integrity records. This makes it difficult to objectively and accurately reflect the professional ethics of university teachers. On the other hand, the evaluation process often becomes superficial, with methods mainly based on self-assessment, peer reviews, and leadership evaluations. This frequently leads to favoritism among colleagues or perfunctory formalities, directly undermining the practical effectiveness of monitoring faculty moral cultivation. Meanwhile, the incentive and constraint mechanisms for moral cultivation are imbalanced. Outstanding teachers in terms of professional ethics lack substantial rewards, such as preferential treatment in title evaluations or honorary recognitions, failing to exert positive guidance [9]. Conversely, insufficient penalties for ethical misconduct in teaching have failed to establish effective countermeasures, ultimately exacerbating the formalization of moral evaluation processes.

3. Suggestions for improving the professional ethics of college teachers

3.1. Strengthening the consciousness of educators in colleges and universities and improving the weakening of educators' responsibilities

Teachers, burdened with multiple roles in teaching, research, administration, and social responsibilities, often experience mental fatigue. This exacerbates the imbalance between academic focus and student development, ultimately weakening their educational mission. To address this, a systematic approach is needed: First, prioritize core teaching tasks to reduce non-academic workloads. Second, streamline university administrative procedures by eliminating unnecessary meetings, reports, and inspections. Third, empower teachers to devote more time to teaching and mentoring. Fourth, implement support mechanisms to prevent non-teaching tasks from encroaching on educational efforts. These measures will fundamentally enhance professional ethics and cultivate a more effective teaching workforce [10].

Setting minimum teaching work requirements: Universities should establish weekly quotas for teaching faculty to allocate time to course design, classroom instruction, and student feedback. Teaching management systems must track instructional hours, with non-compliant teachers suspended from research project applications and social service engagements, prioritizing their teaching commitments. Enhancing pedagogical focus: The evaluation system should be restructured to prioritize teaching responsibilities. Teachers with long-term frontline teaching experience and exemplary professional ethics should receive policy incentives

in promotion evaluations, balancing excessive research emphasis. Those identified as neglecting student development should face public naming on campus bulletin boards, with mandatory training programs and evaluation results influencing future promotions. Strengthening faculty-student communication: Teachers must schedule weekly dedicated sessions covering academic, career, and psychological support [11]. Role-specific scenarios should be created—such as research faculty discussing academic ethics during fieldwork, or industry evaluators guiding career paths through workshops—to elevate professional ethics standards and reinforce teachers' role as "guides for learners" [12].

3.2. Strengthening the management of moral education for college teachers and curbing the worsening of academic ethics

Enhancing the standardized management and education of AI software usage by university faculty: To address the cognitive conflicts between AI technology application and academic researchers, and to improve their ability to utilize AI for scholarly creation, universities should clarify specific misconduct behaviors in academic writing involving AI software and establish corresponding penalty standards, thereby strengthening external regulatory mechanisms. On one hand, universities must adhere to a "zero-tolerance" policy, refine prohibitions against AI-related software usage and their consequences, ensuring faculty members clearly understand the fundamental difference between research assistance and plagiarism, as well as the negative impacts of fabricating experimental data or manipulating research results through AI. On the other hand, efforts should be made to integrate AI into teaching and research. While promoting the widespread use of AI software, institutions should provide systematic AI skills training and ethics courses (referencing East China Normal University's "Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence" and "AI Ethics and Governance" series) to enhance ethical awareness among faculty and students. Simultaneously, comprehensive academic supervision should be strengthened, with tools like "CNKI Plagiarism Detection" and "Academic Integrity Systems" being implemented at critical stages such as research project applications, paper publications, and outcome evaluations [13]. These measures will comprehensively identify issues like plagiarism, AI-generated content violations, and fabricated images/code, forming a dual safeguard of "education and supervision."

Intelligent detection system iterative upgrade: To address limitations in current detection technologies, universities must prioritize upgrading their intelligent detection systems to enhance technical prevention effectiveness. First, optimize text detection technology by abandoning monotonous string matching modes and adopting natural language processing (including semantic analysis, syntactic analysis, and contextual understanding) to accurately identify academic misconduct in textual content. On one hand, develop specialized detection tools that utilize data comparison and paper image recognition technologies to detect image forgery and plagiarism, while combining string matching, code structure analysis, and algorithmic logic analysis (combining static and dynamic approaches) to identify code plagiarism. On the other hand, establish an efficient detection system by leveraging big data and cloud computing technologies to build distributed systems for massive data storage and efficient processing, further improving detection accuracy. Building on this foundation, innovate detection mechanisms by vigorously developing watermarking technologies and integrating "AI-assisted intelligent evaluation systems" to strengthen the technical defense against academic misconduct [3].

3.3. Establishing a linkage mechanism of rewards and punishments to reverse the formal tendency of the assessment of teachers' ethics in colleges and universities

In constructing the teacher ethics monitoring system, differentiated strategies should be implemented based on the resource endowments of different universities. For institutions in regions with weak resource

foundations, given their relative lack of monitoring technologies and professional personnel, the government and education authorities should lead efforts to decentralize resources. This involves integrating regional monitoring technologies (e.g., developing a unified teacher ethics monitoring information system) and professional resources (e.g., establishing cross-institutional expert databases), with shared allocation implemented by school districts or regions. This approach addresses the shortcomings of insufficient resources at individual institutions and gradually reduces direct dependence on higher-level departments. For universities with significant overall resource advantages in higher education, which already possess strong technical expertise and personnel reserves, it is recommended to conduct routine independent monitoring while aligning with national professional evaluation models. Simultaneously, the functional boundaries of the national higher education quality monitoring data platform should be expanded to establish databases for teacher ethics development status and expert evaluation panels. Third-party professional institutions should be entrusted to provide operational guidance, technical support, and talent assistance, ultimately forming a more autonomous, professional, and systematic monitoring framework.

Clarifying evaluation metrics and optimizing assessment methods for university faculty: By encouraging faculty to conduct self-reflection using quantifiable indicators such as student satisfaction ratings, educational outcomes, and academic integrity records, we can transform externally imposed requirements into intrinsic growth needs. This approach not only guides educators to cultivate lifelong learning awareness and continuously update their educational philosophies and ethical standards, but also establishes long-term mechanisms for professional ethics development. Through institutionalized cultivation, quantifiable metrics like student satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, and academic integrity should be integrated into daily evaluations and career tracking systems. Clear tiered disciplinary standards must be implemented, with graduated measures ranging from public reprimands to termination of employment or industry bans for ethical violations. Public disclosure of penalties will create deterrent effects, while an academic integrity blacklist enables cross-institutional disciplinary actions to prevent faculty misconduct from facilitating job transfers. Faculty ethics performance should be fully incorporated into talent evaluations and professional title assessments, directly linked to career development opportunities and compensation packages. Outstanding ethical conduct should receive dual incentives of material rewards and recognition, establishing clear value orientations. This comprehensive approach effectively addresses the formalistic tendencies in teacher ethics evaluations, achieving a win-win outcome for educational development and ethical cultivation in higher education.

4. Conclusion

The cultivation of professional ethics among university faculty constitutes a systematic endeavor that demands both holistic integration and sustained impact. Institutional frameworks must serve as the bedrock, establishing clear standards for academic integrity and pedagogical responsibilities while implementing rigorous oversight mechanisms to establish unbreachable ethical boundaries. Concurrently, educational guidance should be prioritized, employing methods like ideological immersion and self-reflection to ignite faculty members' intrinsic motivation for ethical practice. Only when educators genuinely embrace ethical enhancement as their core professional pursuit and internalize the mission of "nurturing virtue through education" as an innate commitment can we fundamentally elevate the moral standards of the academic community. This approach will ultimately cultivate high-caliber talents aligned with contemporary needs, thereby laying a solid foundation for the high-quality development of higher education.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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