

The Contemporary Value, Practical Challenges, and Implementation Pathways of Moral Education in Higher Education under the “Investing in People” Framework

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Abstract: “Investing in people” is an important strategic orientation for advancing high-quality development in the new era and provides a new educational rationale for innovation in moral education in higher education ^[1]. At present, moral education in universities continues to face practical challenges, including short-term educational perspectives, imbalances in resource provision, and inadequate long-term support mechanisms. Guided by the principle of “investing in people,” universities should update their educational philosophies, optimize resource allocation, and strengthen collaborative support mechanisms. These measures can enhance the effectiveness of moral education and promote the comprehensive development of young people’s moral character and overall competencies.

Keywords: Investing in people; Moral education in higher education; Fostering virtue through education

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1. Introduction

As China advances its modernization in the new era, “investing in people” has become an important orientation for national high-quality development, reflecting a growing emphasis on the coordinated advancement of material development and comprehensive human development ^[2]. Universities are entrusted with the important mission of fostering virtue through education and cultivating a new generation capable of meeting the demands of the times. Moral education is not only a major means of shaping young people’s values and character but also a key pathway for implementing the principle of “investing in people” and promoting their holistic development. Against the backdrop of the development of new quality productive forces and the increasing pluralization of social values, conventional approaches to moral education in higher education have gradually revealed limitations in educational philosophy, teaching methods, and resource support ^[3,4]. It is therefore necessary to draw on the educational rationale of “investing in people” to examine the contemporary value, practical challenges, and implementation pathways of moral education in universities ^[5,6].

2. The contemporary value of “investing in people” for moral education in higher education

2.1. Addressing human-centered developmental needs and strengthening the internal foundations of moral education

Conventional moral education in universities often adopts uniform and standardized approaches that emphasize the transmission of norms and the enforcement of institutional rules. Such approaches pay insufficient attention to students’ deeper and individualized developmental needs. Consequently, students tend to accept moral requirements passively and may struggle to develop stable moral autonomy.

The principle of “investing in people” adopts a student-centered orientation and emphasizes respect for the developmental patterns of young adults. Through humanistic care, psychological counseling, and value guidance, it responds to the practical difficulties university students encounter in academic study, employment, and interpersonal relationships, helping them strengthen their capacity for value judgment and their awareness of self-discipline. At the same time, the principle emphasizes differentiated education. By providing tiered and categorized guidance according to students’ backgrounds, personality traits, and levels of cognitive development, universities can shift from uniform instruction to targeted cultivation, thereby improving the relevance and effectiveness of moral education ^[7].

2.2. Addressing resource deficiencies and improving the overall moral education ecosystem

Moral education in universities has long been characterized by an emphasis on theory over practice and on formal activities over substantive support. Faculty capacity, experiential learning platforms, and campus culture remain relatively underdeveloped. The principle of “investing in people,” with its emphasis on targeted investment and systemic support, can help address these deficiencies.

First, strengthening the professional development of moral educators and improving mechanisms for professional ethics education, pedagogical training, and teaching-related research and exchange can enhance teachers’ capacity for value guidance and their influence as moral role models. Second, expanding platforms for volunteer service, public welfare activities, and social research can connect classroom education with society. These platforms allow students to understand and practice moral principles in real-life contexts, facilitating the transition from moral knowledge to moral action. Third, integrating educational resources to cultivate a positive campus culture can contribute to a moral education ecosystem involving all staff, covering the entire educational process, and operating across multiple dimensions ^[8].

2.3. Aligning with national talent strategies and consolidating the moral foundations of a new generation

Universities are important institutions for cultivating high-quality talent, and the moral character of young people has direct implications for national development and rejuvenation. By closely connecting young people’s growth with the country’s long-term strategies, the principle of “investing in people” facilitates the alignment of moral education with contemporary talent development needs.

On the one hand, education in commitment to the nation, social responsibility, and ideals and convictions can guide young people to integrate their personal aspirations into national development and rejuvenation, thereby cultivating dedication to the country and a strong sense of responsibility. On the other hand, in the context of high-quality development, society no longer evaluates talent solely in terms of professional competence but increasingly emphasizes integrity, respect for rules, civic responsibility, and overall capabilities. Moral education guided by the principle of “investing in people” can thus contribute to cultivating well-rounded

individuals who possess both professional competence and moral integrity ^[9].

3. Practical challenges in applying the principle of “investing in people” to moral education

3.1. Short-term educational perspectives and a weakened human-centered orientation

Moral education in some universities remains excessively dependent on inspections and assessments and is often delivered through short-term, intensive campaigns. Such practices fail to provide sustained attention to long-term changes in students’ values and the gradual formation of moral character, reducing moral education to a procedural exercise undertaken merely to meet administrative requirements ^[10].

Meanwhile, institutional resources tend to be allocated to visible performance indicators such as disciplinary development, research outputs, and graduate employment rates. Because moral education takes time to produce results and its outcomes are often less visible, it is frequently marginalized. Moreover, some universities continue to rely on uniform curricula and standardized didactic instruction. These approaches neglect individual differences among students and cannot adequately meet their increasingly diverse and personalized developmental needs.

3.2. Imbalances in resource provision and insufficient support for moral practice

First, the professional development of moral educators lacks sufficient specificity. Training programs tend to focus on policy requirements and teaching standards while paying inadequate attention to psychological counseling, individualized guidance, and emotional communication, thereby limiting the effectiveness of targeted education ^[11].

Second, external experiential learning platforms remain underdeveloped. Students have limited opportunities to participate in community service, public welfare activities, and social governance, resulting in a persistent gap between moral knowledge and moral action ^[12].

Third, psychological and emotional support resources are insufficient. Psychological services in universities tend to prioritize intervention after problems have emerged, while regular and preventive emotional education receives inadequate attention. This limits the internalization and consolidation of students’ moral emotions.

3.3. Inadequate long-term support and an underdeveloped collaborative education system

Funding for moral education currently lacks institutionalized arrangements and is often temporary and discretionary. As a result, initiatives involving faculty training, experiential learning centers, and student support cannot be sustained effectively.

In addition, existing evaluation systems rely excessively on quantitative indicators such as attendance, participation in activities, and comprehensive assessment scores. They lack rigorous evaluation of students’ internal character, moral autonomy, and everyday conduct, which may encourage an instrumental approach to moral education. Furthermore, collaborative mechanisms linking families, universities, and society remain underdeveloped. Limited coordination among these actors and their respective resources prevents the formation of a stable and effective educational partnership ^[13].

4. Implementation pathways for moral education guided by the principle of “investing in people”

4.1. Transforming conventional educational perspectives and establishing a long-term, human-centered orientation

Universities should move away from periodic moral education activities designed primarily to meet inspection and assessment requirements. In accordance with the long-term and gradual nature of young people’s moral development, universities should establish a progressive moral education system covering all four years of undergraduate study and effectively connect first-year adjustment, ongoing development, and preparation for graduation.

Universities should also implement tiered and differentiated education by providing targeted guidance based on students’ ideological characteristics and developmental concerns, thereby improving the responsiveness of moral education. In addition, students’ active role should be fully respected. Platforms for self-reflection, self-education, and self-assessment should be established to facilitate a transition from passive acceptance to active moral self-discipline ^[14].

4.2. Optimizing resource allocation and strengthening the foundations of moral education

Universities should adjust their resource allocation structures and correct the tendency to prioritize research and teaching while neglecting moral education. Stable, dedicated funding should be established to support campus culture, thematic educational activities, and student assistance programs. Immersive moral education settings should also be developed to strengthen the educational function of the campus environment.

Regular faculty development mechanisms should be established to enhance educators’ professional competence in understanding young people’s psychological characteristics, providing value guidance, and addressing ideological concerns. This will contribute to the development of a highly qualified team of moral educators. Universities should also integrate external resources, including local communities, public welfare organizations, and educational sites associated with China’s revolutionary history and traditions. Long-term experiential learning platforms can enable students to appreciate integrity, responsibility, and dedication in authentic social contexts, thereby integrating moral knowledge with ethical action ^[15,16].

4.3. Strengthening long-term institutional support and establishing a multi-stakeholder collaborative education system

Funding for moral education should be incorporated into universities’ regular annual budgets, with clear funding proportions and expenditure standards, to establish a continuous and stable support mechanism. Moral education evaluation systems should also be reformed. While retaining necessary quantitative indicators, universities should introduce process-oriented assessments of everyday conduct, value identification, moral autonomy, and character development to accurately reflect students’ long-term progress.

At the same time, collaborative mechanisms among families, universities, and society should be strengthened. Families should be encouraged to attach greater importance to moral development, while universities should actively cooperate with government agencies, local communities, and public welfare organizations. Through coordinated participation, resource sharing, and continuous educational engagement, the principle of “investing in people” can be embedded throughout the entire process of moral education in higher education.

5. Conclusion

“Investing in people” is not only an important principle for high-quality development in the new era but also a key guideline for the transformation and advancement of moral education in higher education. In response to short-term educational perspectives, imbalanced resource structures, and inadequate support mechanisms, universities must place student development at the center of their efforts and promote changes in educational philosophy, optimize resource allocation, and improve collaborative mechanisms. These measures will enhance the relevance, practical orientation, and sustainability of moral education. Only through such efforts can universities fulfill the fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education and cultivate a new generation characterized by both moral integrity and professional competence and capable of contributing to national rejuvenation.

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