

Research on Fostering Virtue and Cultivating People in Applied Undergraduate Universities from the Perspective of Recognition Theory

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Abstract: At present, applied undergraduate universities face practical challenges in fostering virtue and talent, including the lack of emotional recognition, misaligned legal recognition, and deviations in achievement recognition—essentially reflecting a deficiency or misplacement of recognition. Therefore, guided by recognition theory, universities should build an all-round and multi-level approach to fostering virtue and talent across three dimensions: creating an educational environment with humanistic care, improving the student-centered institutional system, and establishing an integrated evaluation system of morality and skills, so as to ultimately cultivate high-quality applied talents with moral character, professional skills and a strong sense of responsibility who adapt to regional economic and social development.

Keywords: Recognition theory; Applied undergraduate universities; Moral education; Fostering virtue and cultivating people

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1. Introduction

As an important achievement in the development of the Frankfurt School's critical social theory, recognition theory fundamentally reveals that recognition is the core mechanism for individuals to construct complete self-identity and achieve sound personality development, and also a crucial foundation for social integration and the formation of moral order^[1]. Applied undergraduate universities take cultivating high-quality application-oriented talents serving regional economic and social development and fostering talents for the new era as their core mission. Their moral education practice should not only consolidate students' professional competencies, but also cultivate their moral quality and professional ethics^[2-3]. Introducing recognition theory into the moral education practice of applied undergraduate universities can break the predicaments of "instrumentalization" and "one-way orientation" in current moral education, and provide

theoretical support and practical paths for the talent training goal of integrating morality and skills, which carries important theoretical value and practical significance.

2. The core connotation of recognition theory

The ideological context of recognition theory can be traced back to Hegel's Dialectics of Master and Slave. After the development of Habermas, Taylor, and other scholars, Honneth finally formed a systematic theoretical framework in *The Struggle for Recognition* ^[4].

Honneth divides recognition into three interrelated and progressive dimensions, which together form a complete chain of individual self-identity: First, basic emotional recognition from family, intimate bonds, and campus interactions offers security and belonging, builds confidence, and eases applied undergraduates' identity anxiety amid academic pressure ^[5]. Second, rights-based legal recognition, rooted in equal civil rights and campus rules, guarantees equal participation and respect to cultivate self-esteem, with fair incentives and open feedback helping students embrace their subjective role and abide by moral norms. Third, achievement-oriented social recognition, reflected in professional practice, competitions, and social services, validates students' capabilities and accomplishments, fulfills self-worth, fosters self-respect, and enhances professional pride.

The three dimensions are interconnected: emotional recognition provides psychological support, legal recognition safeguards equity, and achievement recognition facilitates social integration. Jointly, they drive applied undergraduates' growth from skilled learners to moral practitioners and advance their transition from self-identity to social identity.

3. The recognition dilemma of moral education in applied universities

3.1. Lack of emotional recognition: From lack of care to lack of confidence

Applied undergraduate universities are usually large-scale and focus on standardized skills training. Teachers tend to put more energy into the completion of teaching tasks and the achievement of scientific research, and pay less attention to students' psychological confusion, career confusion, and other personalized needs, which leads to the fragmentation of emotional responses felt by students, and makes it difficult to form a stable sense of belonging. For example, some teachers are unable to understand students' career planning needs in depth due to the excessive number of students, and only complete teaching through classroom teaching, ignoring emotional interaction.

Some applied undergraduate students have the psychological tendency of self-denial because of the comparison with research-oriented university students; however, if universities overemphasize skill training and ignore humanistic care, it will further strengthen students' cognition that they are only skill tools, leading to a lack of emotional recognition.

3.2. Dislocation of legal recognition: From formalization of system to weakening of subjective sense

The campus system design of some applied universities still takes the convenience of management as the core, rather than serving students. For example, the evaluation of awards and excellence places too much emphasis on achievement or skill competition and ignores students' moral performance such as

social practice and voluntary service; although there are feedback channels, the response is not timely and the processing is not transparent, which leads to the rights recognition felt by students becoming a mere formality, and it is difficult to form the subjective consciousness that “I am the master of the campus.” This system design makes students become passive recipients rather than active participants, weakening their initiative to abide by rules and practice morality.

In order to meet the needs of the industry, some universities cooperate with enterprises to carry out order-based training. However, in the process of cooperation, if they overly accommodate the employment needs of enterprises, such as insufficient job matching, extending the training time, etc., and ignore the students’ right to rest, learning, and choice, students will feel that their rights have been transferred and think that they are the labor force trained for enterprises rather than the subject of education.

3.3. Achievement recognition bias: From single evaluation to value confusion

The achievement recognition of applied universities often focuses on skill indicators, such as the acquisition rate of skill certificates, the number of competition awards, employment rate, etc., while the recognition of students’ moral practice and humanistic quality is insufficient. This kind of single evaluation makes students fall into the misunderstanding of emphasizing skills and ignoring morality, and believes that as long as skills are good, morality does not matter, which is contrary to the training goal of combining morality and technology.

The recognition of achievements in some universities is limited to on-campus scholarships, outstanding student titles, etc., but the core value of applied talents lies in social recognition. If the training standards of universities are out of line with the needs of the industry and social expectations, students’ achievements on campus will not be translated into social recognition, and then fall into value confusion.

4. The practical path of moral education in applied undergraduate universities under the recognition theory

4.1. On the basis of emotional recognition, constructing a humanistic care and education environment

4.1.1. Establish a personalized emotional care mechanism

First, implement the dual tutorial system. Each student is equipped with academic tutors + moral tutors. The academic tutors are responsible for academic guidance and career planning, while the moral tutors are responsible for psychological counseling and emotional support. Through regular interviews and online communication, they can respond to the personalized needs of students in a timely manner, so that students feel concerned. For example, moral tutors can carry out group counseling for students’ identity anxiety to help them correctly understand the value of applied talents.

Second, create a community campus space. Relying on the “one-stop” student community, carry out collective activities such as professional ethics sharing meetings and volunteer service week to promote emotional interaction among students; set up a psychological post station tree hole mailbox to provide students with safe emotional catharsis channels and enhance their sense of belonging. This emotional interaction can enable students to obtain stable emotional support on campus and lay a psychological foundation for the cultivation of moral quality.

4.1.2. Strengthening applied emotional identity

Invite outstanding alumni such as industry technical backbones and successful entrepreneurs to return to school to share their experience of skills achieving life and morality leading the career, so that students can see the social value of applied talents; integrate craftsman spirit and professional ethics elements into the construction of campus culture, such as setting up “skill star wall” and “moral model list”, to strengthen students’ sense of pride in applied identity. For example, by publicizing the deeds of alumni’s adherence to integrity and innovative services in their posts, students can realize that the moral value of applied talents is as important as the value of skills.

4.2. Taking legal recognition as the guarantee to improve the student subject system

4.2.1. Constructing an equal rights guarantee mechanism

First, optimize the evaluation system. In the process of awarding and selecting the best, educators should increase the weight of moral practice and social service, such as including the length of volunteer service, community contribution, and team cooperation performance in the evaluation index, and avoid the achievement-oriented and skill-oriented theory. For example, in the selection of excellent graduates, a university treated the evaluation of enterprise internship, volunteer service experience, and skill scores equally, so that students felt that their moral quality and skill level were recognized.

Second, smooth the channels of participation. Relying on the corresponding departments of the student union, let students participate in the design of the campus system, such as curriculum, training arrangements, logistics services, etc.; establish a closed-loop feedback mechanism to respond to the problems raised by students in a timely manner and disclose the results, so as to protect students’ right to know, participation, and supervision. For example, in the formulation of the order-based training program, students’ representatives are invited to participate in the negotiation, and the rights and interests, such as training time and labor remuneration, are clarified to avoid the neglect of rights.

4.2.2. Balance the right relationship in school-enterprise cooperation

Schools should formulate norms for the protection of students’ rights in school-enterprise cooperation. Clarify the standards of enterprise training time, labor remuneration, safety and security, and prohibit enterprises from exploiting student labor in the name of training; set up a supervision committee for school-enterprise cooperation to attract the participation of student representatives, teacher representatives, and industry experts, and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of students in the cooperation. For example, the specification requires that the training duration of enterprises should not exceed 40 hours per week, and they should be paid according to the local minimum wage standard to ensure that students’ right to rest and labor are recognized.

4.3. With achievement recognition as the core, build an evaluation system for the integration of morality and technology

4.3.1. Construction of diversified achievement evaluation dimensions

First, design a three-dimensional evaluation index. Achievement recognition is divided into skill dimension (professional ability, certificate acquisition, competition results), moral dimension (volunteer service, responsibility, integrity performance), and practice dimension (internship evaluation, project results, and social contribution). Through process evaluation and summative evaluation, students’ growth and value

are fully recognized. For example, in the evaluation of accounting courses, students' professional skills are assessed, as well as whether they comply with accounting professional ethics and actively help team members in training.

Second, promote the evaluation mechanism of industry participation. Invite enterprise experts and representatives of industry associations to participate in training assessment and graduation design defense, and incorporate industry standards and professional ethics into the evaluation system, so that students' achievements in school can be connected with social recognition.

4.3.2. Build a multi-level achievement display platform

Irregularly hold skills + ethics comprehensive display activities, such as vocational skills competition and moral story sharing meeting, so that students can share their stories of dedication, integrity and cooperation in practice while displaying their skills, so as to realize the integration of skills display and moral communication; set up a moral and technical pioneer award to commend students who have outstanding performance in both skills and morality, and let the recognition of achievements cover the two dimensions of morality and technology.

Establish a lifelong tracking mechanism for achievement archives. Establish a file for students' moral and technical development, record their skills improvement, moral practice, and social contributions during school, and share them with employers, so that the recognition of achievements runs through the whole process of "training-employment-development." For example, the files not only record students' skill certificates, but also include their volunteer service certificates and enterprise internship moral evaluation, which help employers understand students comprehensively and make students feel that their own value has been recognized for a long time.

5. Conclusion

The essence of recognition is to respect and affirm the value of people, and the core of morality cultivation is to cultivate new people with ideals, abilities, and responsibilities. For applied undergraduate universities, the integration of recognition theory into the practice of moral education is not only a methodology to solve the current dilemma of moral education, but also a practice of the value theory of the student-centered education concept. It requires universities to turn from the training tool of skills to the cultivation of complete people, give students self-confidence through emotional recognition, give students self-esteem through legal recognition, stimulate students' self-respect through achievement recognition, and finally achieve the training goal of combining morality and technology, and provide high-quality applied talents with morality, skills, and responsibility for regional economic and social development.

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