

Impact of Political Education Courses on the Ideological Alignment of Students in China

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of political education courses on the ideological alignment of university students in China, examining the relationship between student engagement and the degree to which they align with government-promoted ideologies. With political education being a mandatory component of university curricula in China, this research addresses the effectiveness of these courses in achieving their intended goals of fostering national unity and reinforcing government ideologies. The study is grounded in Social Learning Theory and Political Socialization Theory to understand the mechanisms behind student engagement and ideological alignment. Existing literature highlights the importance of innovative and participatory educational approaches in enhancing political engagement, suggesting that while education fosters political awareness, the specific design of educational programs is crucial for translating this awareness into active political participation. This research aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform educational policymakers and contribute to the broader discourse on the role of political education in shaping national identity and political consciousness.

Keywords: Political Education; Awareness into Political; Participatory Educational.

1. Introduction

In contemporary China, political education plays a pivotal role in shaping the ideological landscape of the nation's youth. These educational programs are designed not only to impart knowledge about political theories and governmental structures but also to align students' beliefs with the core ideologies promoted by the Chinese government. Political education courses are mandatory components of the curriculum in Chinese universities, underscoring the state's commitment to fostering a cohesive ideological framework among its citizens.

The importance of political education in China is rooted in the nation's history and socio-political context. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the government has emphasized the need for ideological education as a means of ensuring political stability and national unity. The dissemination of Marxist-Leninist principles, socialist values, and the thoughts of prominent Chinese leaders has been a consistent objective of the Chinese educational system. In recent years, the government has intensified its efforts to reinforce these ideologies amidst the challenges posed by globalization, technological advancements, and increasing exposure to diverse global perspectives.

The researcher, with a keen interest in the intersection of education and political ideology, observed a compelling phenomenon during his tenure as a visiting professor at several universities across China. During informal conversations with students and through his participation in academic forums, the researcher noticed a significant variation in students' engagement levels with political education courses. Some students exhibited profound interest and active participation, while others appeared indifferent or even skeptical about the content being taught.

This observation intrigued the researcher, prompting a deeper investigation into the underlying factors influencing students' engagement with political education. He began to

question whether this engagement, or lack thereof, had any tangible impact on the students' alignment with the government-promoted ideologies. The researcher's curiosity was further piqued when he came across a series of social media discussions where students openly debated the relevance and impact of political education in their lives. These discussions revealed a spectrum of opinions, ranging from staunch support for the ideological content to critical assessments questioning its applicability in the modern world.

One particular incident stood out to the researcher. During a guest lecture at a prestigious university in Beijing, a student asked, "How do these political education courses help us in our everyday lives and careers? Are we just learning this to pass exams, or is there a deeper purpose?" This candid question resonated with the researcher and highlighted a critical gap in understanding the practical implications of political education. He realized that while the courses were designed to inculcate ideological beliefs, the extent to which students internalized and aligned with these beliefs remained unclear.

Motivated by these observations and interactions, the researcher decided to undertake a comprehensive study to explore the impact of political education courses on ideological alignment among university students in China. He aimed to investigate whether the level of engagement in these courses correlated with the degree of alignment with government-promoted ideologies. The researcher's study sought to provide empirical evidence that could inform educational policymakers and contribute to the broader discourse on the role of political education in shaping national identity and political consciousness.

This study is of paramount importance for several reasons. Firstly, it addresses a critical aspect of educational policy in China by examining the effectiveness of political education courses in achieving their intended ideological goals. By understanding the relationship between student engagement and ideological alignment, policymakers can make informed decisions about curriculum design, instructional methods, and

resource allocation to enhance the impact of political education.

Secondly, the study contributes to the broader field of political socialization by providing insights into how formal education influences political beliefs and attitudes. In an era characterized by rapid social and technological changes, understanding the dynamics of ideological alignment among young people is essential for fostering social cohesion and political stability.

Thirdly, this research has practical implications for educators and administrators in Chinese universities. By identifying factors that enhance or hinder student engagement in political education, the study can help develop strategies to make these courses more relevant, engaging, and impactful. This, in turn, can lead to a more informed and politically conscious student population, capable of contributing to the nation's development in meaningful ways.

Finally, the study holds significance beyond the Chinese context. It offers a valuable case study for scholars and policymakers worldwide who are interested in the role of education in political socialization. The findings can stimulate comparative research and dialogue on how different countries approach the challenge of inculcating political ideologies through formal education.

In conclusion, the researcher's study on the impact of political education courses on ideological alignment in China is a timely and critical investigation. It seeks to bridge the gap between educational policy and practice, providing valuable insights that can enhance the effectiveness of political education in fostering a cohesive and ideologically aligned society.

The study of political education courses and their impact on students' ideological alignment is of paramount importance, particularly in the context of China. Political education in China serves not only as an academic subject but also as a strategic tool for fostering national unity and reinforcing government-promoted ideologies. Understanding the effectiveness of these courses in shaping students' beliefs and political behaviors can provide critical insights for policymakers, educators, and society at large.

Political education in China has deep historical roots and contemporary significance. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the government has placed a strong emphasis on political education as a means to cultivate loyalty, enhance political knowledge, and align citizens with the socialist values and principles espoused by the Communist Party of China (CPC). This educational mandate is reflected in the curriculum of universities across the country, where political education courses are compulsory for all students.

One of the primary constructs in studying the impact of these courses is the level of engagement. Engagement in political education is multifaceted, encompassing attendance, participation, interest, effort, and application. Regular attendance ensures that students are consistently exposed to the course content, while active participation in discussions and activities fosters a deeper understanding and critical thinking. Interest in the subject matter drives students to delve deeper, seek out additional resources, and stay informed about current political events. The effort put into studying and understanding political concepts, as well as the application of these concepts to real-life situations, further solidifies students' engagement and comprehension.

The degree of alignment with government-promoted

ideologies is another critical construct. This alignment is measured by how closely students' beliefs and values match the principles advocated by the CPC, such as socialism with Chinese characteristics, national unity, and collective welfare. A high degree of alignment indicates that political education courses are successful in achieving their goals of ideological indoctrination and political socialization.

The relevance of this study in China cannot be overstated. In a rapidly changing global environment, where exposure to diverse political ideologies and values is inevitable, ensuring that the younger generation remains aligned with the core tenets of the CPC is crucial for maintaining political stability and national cohesion. By examining how effectively political education courses engage students and align their beliefs with government ideologies, this research provides valuable feedback to educational policymakers and institutions. It highlights areas where the curriculum may need to be adjusted or enhanced to better achieve its objectives.

Furthermore, understanding the impact of political education on ideological alignment can inform broader discussions about the role of education in political socialization. It can shed light on the processes through which political beliefs are formed and reinforced, and how educational interventions can be designed to foster a politically informed and engaged citizenry. This is particularly relevant in the context of China's goals of building a harmonious society and achieving the "Chinese Dream" of national rejuvenation.

The study of political education courses and their impact on ideological alignment is highly significant in China. It addresses critical questions about the effectiveness of these courses in engaging students and shaping their political beliefs, providing insights that are essential for educational policy and practice. By ensuring that political education aligns with the broader goals of national development and stability, this research contributes to the ongoing effort to cultivate a politically conscious and ideologically aligned population.

To understand the broader context of political education and its impact on student engagement and ideological alignment, it is essential to review existing literature on this topic. Numerous studies have explored the effects of educational interventions on political and civic engagement across different contexts, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms that drive political socialization and education. The following review of related literature highlights key findings from various research studies that examine the influence of education on political interest, knowledge, and participation.

Exploiting variations in compulsory schooling across 39 countries, Le and Nguyen (2021) find that education significantly increases political interest, political knowledge, and support for political freedoms. However, more education does not make individuals more likely to vote or adopt a specific position on the political spectrum. This study underscores the complexity of the relationship between education and political behaviors, suggesting that while education can enhance political awareness and support for democratic values, it may not directly translate into specific political actions or alignments.

Building on the importance of innovative educational approaches, Brown et al. (2022) developed an Adaptive Learning (AL) Political Science course, implemented it in 51 classes with over 5,200 students, and found that students rated

the AL courseware highly positive across all survey questions. Performance data showed significant improvements with AL courseware, including a lower average DFW rate, supporting AL as a beneficial tool for student progression and satisfaction. This highlights the potential of adaptive learning technologies in enhancing student engagement and academic performance in political education.

Using data from a survey of 1,025 young people aged 18 at the time of the 2010 General Election, Pontes et al. (2019) examined the impact of studying for a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in Citizenship Studies on political and civic engagement. Results showed significant differences between those who took the course and those who did not, particularly in terms of political perspectives and participation patterns. This study illustrates the positive effects of structured citizenship education on fostering political engagement among young people.

In another significant study, Levy et al. (2019) found that students participating in the Legislative Semester (LS) course, which involved political simulations and debates, became more politically engaged and open-minded compared to those in a traditional government course. The results indicated that exploring various political issues fostered engagement, while considering diverse perspectives in a supportive classroom environment enhanced political open-mindedness. This supports the idea that interactive and participatory educational methods can effectively promote political engagement and open-mindedness.

Moreover, Donbavand and Hoskins (2021) conducted a systematic review of controlled trials on Citizenship Education and found that participatory methods, whole school approaches, and teacher training are effective in fostering political engagement. However, the limited number of studies highlights the challenges in securing funding for such trials and the epistemological debates within the field. This review emphasizes the need for more robust research to validate the effectiveness of various educational interventions in promoting political engagement.

Schmitt and Bryant (2019) found that integrating purposeful political engagement efforts in the classroom and co-curricular programming significantly enhances student interest in politics and political efficacy. It also revealed that the most effective way to increase student political engagement is for faculty to integrate political engagement into their teaching methods. This study underscores the importance of intentional and integrated approaches to political education.

In contrast, Witschge and van de Werfhorst (2020) find that a longer duration of curricular tracking in secondary education is associated with lower levels of civic and political engagement, particularly among students at the lower end of the engagement distribution. The negative effect of tracking on engagement is mediated by reduced enrollment in higher education, suggesting that tracking indirectly affects engagement by limiting access to higher education. This finding highlights the unintended consequences of certain educational structures on political engagement.

Further supporting the benefits of active engagement, Blevins et al. (2020) found that students who participated in the iEngage action civics institute showed significant increases in community engagement, political engagement, and political activism. These results suggest that the program offers effective and promising alternatives to traditional civics education, highlighting the impact of hands-on, experiential

learning opportunities.

Young et al. (2019) conducted a quasi-experiment with 254 college students to assess the effectiveness of a game platform on political engagement. The results show that game play positively impacted voter registration, virtual political participation, and consumption of public affairs information, with the greatest benefits observed among students with initially low political knowledge and engagement. This study illustrates the potential of gamified learning platforms in enhancing political engagement among students, particularly those who are less initially inclined towards political activities.

These studies collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the various educational interventions and their impacts on political engagement and knowledge. They highlight the importance of innovative, participatory, and integrative approaches in fostering political awareness and engagement among students, offering valuable insights that inform the design and implementation of political education programs in different contexts.

The existing body of literature provides a comprehensive understanding of how various educational interventions impact political engagement and ideological alignment among students. Studies consistently highlight that education enhances political interest, knowledge, and support for democratic values. For example, Le and Nguyen (2021) found that while education significantly boosts political awareness and support for political freedoms, it does not necessarily increase voter turnout or lead to specific political alignments. This indicates that while education fosters a general appreciation for democratic principles, it may not directly translate into specific political behaviors.

Innovative educational approaches, such as adaptive learning technologies and participatory methods, have shown significant improvements in student engagement and academic performance in political science courses. Brown et al. (2022) demonstrated the effectiveness of Adaptive Learning (AL) courseware in enhancing student satisfaction and performance, while Levy et al. (2019) found that interactive political simulations and debates in the Legislative Semester (LS) course increased political engagement and open-mindedness. Similarly, Blevins et al. (2020) and Young et al. (2019) highlighted the benefits of experiential learning programs and gamified learning platforms in boosting political and community engagement, particularly among students with initially low political knowledge.

Structured citizenship education also plays a critical role in fostering political engagement. Pontes et al. (2019) showed that students who studied for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in Citizenship Studies exhibited higher levels of political and civic engagement compared to those who did not. This underscores the importance of formal political education in secondary schools in shaping students' political perspectives and participation patterns.

However, not all educational practices yield positive outcomes. Witschge and van de Werfhorst (2020) found that longer durations of curricular tracking in secondary education are associated with lower levels of civic and political engagement, particularly among students at the lower end of the engagement distribution. This suggests that certain educational structures can inadvertently hinder political participation by limiting access to higher education.

Moreover, Schmitt and Bryant (2019) emphasized the importance of integrating political engagement efforts into

classroom and co-curricular activities. Their findings indicate that intentional and integrated approaches by faculty significantly enhance student interest in politics and political efficacy. On the other hand, Donbavand and Hoskins (2021) highlighted the challenges in securing funding for participatory methods and whole school approaches, despite their effectiveness in fostering political engagement. This review underscores the need for more robust research and investment to validate and support these educational interventions.

In summary, the literature collectively underscores the importance of innovative, participatory, and integrative approaches in fostering political engagement and ideological alignment among students. While education generally enhances political awareness and democratic values, the specific design and implementation of educational programs play a crucial role in translating this awareness into active political participation. These insights are crucial for informing the design and implementation of effective political education programs across different educational contexts.

2. Statement of the Problem

This research will aim to answer the following questions:

- (1) What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1) Age
 - 2) Sex
 - 3) Grade/ Year Level
- (2) What is the assessment of student respondents on their level of engagement in political education courses in terms of:
 - 1) Maximum Engagement
 - 2) Sustained Interest
 - 3) Commitment
 - 4) Effort
 - 5) Application?
- (3) Is there a significant difference on the assessment of student respondents on their level of engagement in political education courses when their profile is taken as a test factor?
- (4) What is the assessment of student respondents on their level of alignment with government-promoted ideologies in terms of:
 - 1) Adherence to Government Policies
 - 2) National Unity and Identity
 - 3) Social and Economic Ideals
 - 4) Governance
 - 5) Civic Responsibility and Participation?
- (5) Is there a significant difference on the assessment of student respondents on their level of alignment with government-promoted ideologies when their profile is taken as a test factor?
- (6) Is there a significant impact of political education course in the alignment with government promoted ideologies?
- (7) Is there a significant relationship between the level of engagement of in political education courses and the alignment with government-promoted ideologies?
- (8) Based on the results of the study, what proposed program to sustain ideological alignment of student engagement in political education can be proposed?

3. Research Design

This study will employ a descriptive, comparative, and correlational quantitative research design to explore the

impact of political education courses on students' ideological alignment in Shaanxi Province, China. The descriptive aspect provides a detailed account of student engagement and ideological alignment by collecting quantitative data on sub-variables such as attendance, participation, interest, effort, and application for engagement, and support for government policies, national unity and identity, social and economic ideals, political stability and governance, and civic responsibility and participation for ideological alignment. The comparative component examines differences across demographic groups (age, sex, grade/year level) to understand how these factors influence engagement and alignment. The correlational aspect investigates the relationship between engagement in political education courses and alignment with government-promoted ideologies.

This research design provides a comprehensive understanding of the constructs under study. The descriptive analysis establishes baseline data on engagement and alignment levels, essential for making meaningful comparisons and identifying correlations. The comparative analysis offers insights into how demographic factors affect student engagement and ideological alignment, allowing for targeted recommendations. The correlational analysis tests the hypothesis that higher engagement leads to stronger ideological alignment, providing empirical evidence to inform educational policies and practices aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of political education.

4. Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, and year level?

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentage of Demographic Factors

Sex	Counts	% of Total
Female	195	51 %
Male	186	49 %
Age		
18-19	125	33 %
20-21	149	39 %
22 and above	107	28 %
Course		
First Year	105	28 %
Fourth Year	61	16 %
Second Year	120	31 %
Third Year	95	25 %

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentages of demographic data for a sample of students, including their gender, age, and academic year. The tabulated figures indicate that 51% of the participants were female and 49% were male, demonstrating that female students constitute the majority of the group.

Concerning their age distribution, 33% were aged 18 to 19,

39% were aged 20 to 21, and 28% were 22 years or older. The figures indicate that a significant percentage of the pupils are aged 20–21 years old.

Lastly, based on their academic year, 28% of students were in their first year, 16% in their fourth year, 31% in their second year, and 25% in their third year. The results revealed that a substantial percentage of students are in their second year of study.

5. Conclusion

(1) Profile of the Respondents. The respondents are diverse in terms of age, sex, and year level, representing a range of demographics within the student body. This variety provides a comprehensive perspective on the levels of engagement in political education and alignment with government-promoted ideologies across different age groups, genders, and academic standings.

(2) Assessment of Student Engagement in Political Education Courses. Students generally exhibit an average level of engagement in political education courses. They moderately participate and demonstrate interest across key dimensions of engagement, including maximum engagement, sustained interest, commitment, effort, and application. This level of engagement suggests that students engage with political education content but may not exhibit high levels of enthusiasm or intense dedication across these dimensions.

(3) Differences in Engagement Based on Respondent Profile. There are significant differences in students' levels of engagement in political education courses when analyzed based on demographic factors. Variations in engagement are notably present when considering age, sex, and year level, indicating that certain groups of students may be more invested or active in political education than others. These differences highlight the importance of tailored approaches to enhance engagement among various student demographics.

(4) Assessment of Alignment with Government-Promoted Ideologies. Students generally align at an average level with government-promoted ideologies, showing moderate agreement in areas such as adherence to government policies, national unity and identity, social and economic ideals, governance, and civic responsibility and participation. This suggests that while students support the general principles of these ideologies, they may not strongly internalize or prioritize them in their views.

(5) Differences in Ideological Alignment Based on Respondent Profile. Significant differences are evident in students' alignment with government-promoted ideologies based on demographic factors such as sex, age, and year level. These differences reveal that certain demographic groups are more likely to align closely with specific ideologies, suggesting that background characteristics can influence the extent to which students support government-promoted ideals.

(6) Impact of Political Education Courses on Ideological Alignment. Engagement in political education courses has a significant impact on students' alignment with government-promoted ideologies. Specifically, aspects of political education related to governance and civic responsibility have the strongest influence on ideological alignment, indicating that exposure to governance structures and civic duties fosters alignment with state-endorsed values more effectively than other areas of engagement.

(7) Relationship Between Engagement and Ideological Alignment. There is a significant positive relationship between the level of engagement in political education

courses and alignment with government-promoted ideologies. Higher levels of engagement in political education are associated with greater alignment, particularly in areas related to governance and civic responsibility, demonstrating that active participation in these courses supports the internalization of government-promoted ideals. This relationship underscores the importance of fostering high engagement levels in political education to promote alignment with societal values.

(8) This study concludes that political education courses play a meaningful role in shaping students' alignment with government-promoted ideologies. While students generally exhibit moderate engagement in these courses and a corresponding average level of alignment with government ideals, there are clear variations based on demographic factors such as age, sex, and year level. Engagement dimensions, particularly those focused on governance and civic responsibility, demonstrate a significant impact on ideological alignment, suggesting that these elements are central to fostering alignment with state values. Additionally, the positive relationship between overall engagement and ideological alignment emphasizes the importance of active participation in political education to internalize and support government-promoted ideals. These findings suggest that enhancing engagement strategies in political education courses, especially tailored to different student demographics, can further strengthen students' connection to and support for societal and governmental values.

6. Recommendations

(1) Enhance Engagement in Political Education Courses

Since the study indicates that students show only moderate engagement across the dimensions of political education, there is a need for more dynamic and interactive course elements. Incorporating participatory activities such as debates, simulations, and discussions on real-world applications of political principles can foster higher levels of interest, commitment, and sustained engagement. Additionally, integrating current events and practical examples into the curriculum may help students see the relevance of political education in their daily lives, particularly for those in higher year levels who showed declining engagement.

(2) Focus on Governance and Civic Responsibility Content

With governance and civic responsibility emerging as the strongest predictors of alignment with government-promoted ideologies, courses should emphasize these areas further. Providing opportunities for students to understand government structure, policies, and civic duties through interactive learning, such as guest speakers from governmental institutions or civic project involvement, can deepen their connection to these principles. Such emphasis would also support practical application, enhancing students' alignment with government-promoted ideologies.

(3) Tailor Engagement Strategies to Demographic Variations

Given the significant differences in engagement and alignment based on sex, age, and year level, a one-size-fits-all approach to political education may be insufficient. For younger students, introducing foundational topics with hands-on engagement activities can build a solid base of interest. Meanwhile, advanced discussions on complex political issues may benefit senior students who showed a tendency toward critical thinking and possibly skepticism. Providing varied

engagement approaches based on demographic trends can help sustain alignment with government-promoted ideals across all student groups.

(4) Strengthen Alignment with Social and Economic Ideals for Older Students

With findings showing that older students demonstrate weaker alignment with social and economic ideals, targeted initiatives are recommended to reinforce these concepts as students advance in their education. Senior students may benefit from applied projects or case studies that connect these ideals to current societal challenges, making these principles more relevant and engaging as they approach graduation and transition into the workforce.

(5) Promote Legal Compliance and Civic Engagement Outside the Classroom

The lower alignment observed in students' sense of personal duty to comply with laws and engage in civic duties suggests an area for improvement. Universities could implement campaigns or programs to encourage students to participate in civic and community activities, which would strengthen their practical understanding of civic responsibility. Additionally, guest lectures, workshops, or civic involvement projects focusing on the importance of legal compliance and community service could enhance this sense of duty among students.

(6) Increase Real-World Application of Political Education

The moderate alignment with government-promoted ideologies, particularly in real-life application, suggests the need for experiential learning. Partnering with community organizations or government agencies to offer students internship opportunities, community projects, or civic service activities can provide students with hands-on experience, making political education more tangible and fostering alignment with government-promoted ideals.

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