

Research on the Adaptive Reform of Teaching Methods for Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Vocational Education in the Context of Diversified Student Populations

Wenbin Wang, Pingfan Xu

Zhongshan Polytechnic, Zhongshan, Guangdong, 528400, China

Abstract: With the implementation of the policy of recruiting millions of students to higher vocational colleges, China's higher vocational education has entered an era of diversified student sources, and traditional teaching methods can no longer meet the learning needs of students at different levels. Taking the theoretical course of ideological and political education in higher vocational colleges as an example, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the current situation and challenges of the theoretical course of ideological and political education in higher vocational colleges against the background of diversified student sources through multidimensional questionnaire surveys and data analysis. In order to adapt to the tendency of diversified student sources, this paper proposes a strategy for adapting the teaching methods of ideological and political theory courses in higher vocational colleges, namely the "two divisions, two rings and six steps" "layered help learning" reform, which can effectively adapt to the current diversified student background, and also help improve the relevance and effectiveness of ideological and political theory courses, and promote the comprehensive development of students. It not only provides a theoretical basis and practical guidance for the teaching reform of ideological and political theory courses in higher vocational colleges, but also opens up new perspectives and ideas for research in related fields.

Keywords: Diversified Student Population; Ideological and Political Theory Courses for College Students; Adaptive Changes in Teaching Methods; Teaching Strategies.

1. Introduction

As China's economy shifts from rapid growth to high-quality development, its economic structure has also entered a critical period of transformation of development methods, reform of economic structure and transformation of growth engines. However, there is still a prominent structural contradiction between the supply and demand of high-quality technical and professional talents. To resolve this contradiction [1], on March 5, 2019, Premier Li Keqiang mentioned for the first time in the government work report that enrollment in higher vocational colleges will be expanded by 1 million in 2019, including 1,418 higher vocational colleges [2]. On May 6, 2019, the Ministry of Education and five other departments issued a notice on the issuance of the "Special Work Implementation Plan for Expanding Enrollment in Higher Vocational Colleges". On May 22, 2020, Premier Li Keqiang proposed in his government work report that "this year and next year, more than 35 million vocational training sessions will be held, and enrollment in higher vocational colleges will be expanded by 2 million. We must enable more workers to acquire skills and find good jobs [3].

With the implementation of the "Million Recruitment Expansion" policy, there has been a diversification of student sources in higher vocational institutions. There are students from different sources in the same major or even in the same class, such as general high school students, college entrance examination candidates, skilled students, adult education students, and discharged soldiers. Students from different backgrounds have very different expectations about the course content and the classroom environment. For example, students with a good foundation want the course to be "fast,

deep, and broad", while students with a weak foundation want it to be "slow, shallow, and narrow". This is a great challenge for teachers in their daily teaching. On September 10, 2024, Xi Jinping stressed at the National Education Conference that we must focus on the fundamental task of cultivating people with integrity and a strong sense of right and wrong, and make steady progress toward the strategic goal of building a strong educational power with Chinese characteristics. How can Chinese methods meet the diverse needs of students from different backgrounds? How can teaching methods be reformed to achieve the goal of all vocational students progressing and achieving together? These are urgent problems to be solved. Taking the theoretical course of ideological and political education in vocational colleges as an example, this paper conducts in-depth analysis and empirical research on the adaptability of teaching methods in the context of students' diverse backgrounds. This undoubtedly has important practical significance.

2. The Significance of Studying the Adaptive Changes in Teaching Methods for Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Vocational Education in the Context of Diversified Student Sources

Education is a major national and party project, and it shoulders the fundamental task of cultivating people with integrity and good character. The development of higher vocational education has now come to occupy half of higher education. According to statistics, in 2023, there will be 1,242 ordinary undergraduate schools, 33 vocational schools at the

undergraduate level, and 1,547 higher vocational (specialist) schools among the national institutions of higher education.

There were 4,781,600 students enrolled in regular undergraduate programs, 89,900 in vocational undergraduate programs, and 5,550,700 in junior college programs.[4]With such a large student body, the diversification of student sources naturally becomes a reality that cannot be ignored. As a key course for implementing the fundamental task of cultivating people with integrity, ideological and political courses keep pace with the times in terms of teaching content, and it is the mission of the times to innovate and upgrade teaching methods. However, at present, in political theory courses in higher vocational colleges, there are common phenomena such as teachers filling the classroom and students covering their heads in books. This shows that the effectiveness of classroom teaching needs to be improved and teaching methods need to be reformed.

2.1. Adapt to the Needs of the Times and Promote Teaching Method Reform

With the arrival of diversified student sources, the heterogeneity of student groups has significantly increased. The traditional unitary and standardized teaching model can no longer meet the learning expectations of students at different levels. Adapting teaching methods to the needs of higher vocational colleges' ideological and political theory courses in the context of diversified student sources. Introducing teaching strategies such as tiered help learning aims to break the shackles of traditional teaching models and achieve diversification and personalization of teaching methods. Tiered help learning not only takes into account the differences in students' learning foundations and abilities, but also focuses on stimulating students' interest and initiative in learning through group cooperation and mutual assistance, thereby effectively improving teaching quality. As a key course for cultivating college students' ideological and political qualities, professional ethics and social responsibility, ideological and political theory courses are highly theoretical and important, and effective and innovative reforms are bound to be carried out to meet the needs of social change for talent.

2.2. Improve Teaching Quality and Forge a Teaching Team

Currently, vocational education is undergoing profound changes, and the “classroom revolution” has emerged as a result. In the context of diversified student sources, the reform of the teaching methods of ideological and political theory courses in higher vocational education not only improves the quality of vocational education, but also provides a wealth of practical cases and experience for the promotion of the “classroom revolution”. Teachers play a key role in this process. Ideological and political theory teachers are a team of people with “strong political awareness, deep feelings, new thinking, broad horizons, strict self-discipline and a positive personality”. In addition to the necessary political literacy, they also need to actively think about the laws of education and teaching. Through the reform of differentiated teaching for students from different backgrounds, the quality of teaching can be effectively improved, while also promoting the improvement of teachers' professionalism and teaching ability.

2.3. Help Students Develop in an All-round Way and Enhance the Appeal of the Curriculum

Theoretical courses in political thought and ethics at higher vocational colleges are not only a place to impart knowledge, but also a key part of cultivating students' ideological and moral qualities and enhancing their comprehensive quality. In the context of diversified student populations, the teaching methods of theoretical courses in political thought and ethics at higher vocational colleges have adapted and changed, focusing on cultivating students' core qualities such as critical thinking, innovation, and teamwork skills, guiding students to form a correct world outlook, outlook on life, and values, and promoting the all-round development of students. Specifically, a variety of teaching methods such as case studies, role-playing, group discussions and social practice are used to enable students with different backgrounds and strengths to find a suitable learning point for themselves. Under the guidance of the teacher, they can engage in targeted discussions and learning, and through participation, experience and reflection, achieve the educational effect of integrating knowledge with action. In addition, by introducing “macro-ideology and politics” into the classroom, teachers can link the small classroom at school with the big classroom of society. By introducing vivid stories and other methods, the appeal of the course is enhanced, and the effectiveness of cultivating students' moral character and educating them is better achieved.

3. A Review of Research on the Adaptive Reform of Vocational Education Pedagogy

Pedagogical reform or teaching method reform is a permanent topic. China has a long tradition of experimenting with teaching methods, and as a type of education, vocational education should have its own teaching method system. From the beginning of the founding of New China, emulating the Soviet Union's five-part classroom, classroom recording and analysis, to the discovery teaching method and procedural teaching method from the United States, the outline signal teaching method and developmental teaching method from the Soviet Union, and then to the recent application of new technology teaching methods represented by the flipped classroom under the “Internet +” trend, all of which have achieved great results. It is of great significance to systematically explore the reform and innovation of vocational education teaching methods in the new development stage.

Domestically, teaching reforms began to develop in China at the beginning of the 20th century, starting with reforms such as the adoption of the five-stage teaching method of Herbart and heuristics. After the 1920s, Western teaching methods such as the design teaching method, the Dalton system, the intelligence test method, and the Winnetka system were comprehensively and systematically introduced to China and put into practice[5].At the beginning of the liberation, Soviet teaching theory was mainly introduced, and teaching methods focused on lectures and exercises[6]. After the reform and opening up, there was a boom in teaching method reforms such as “procedural teaching method”, “problem-based teaching method” and “individual teaching method”. Since then, Bruner's cognitive structure theory,

Piaget's theory of formation and other psychological research results have had a profound impact on teaching method reforms[7]. At the beginning of the 21st century, the trajectory of China's educational community's exploration of new teaching methods was reflected in the transition from teaching and learning as one to teaching as doing and living education. Among them, educators such as Yu Ziyi and Tao Xingzhi created many excellent educational methods. Since the second half of the 20th century, the reform of teaching methods has paid attention to the "normativity" and "scientific nature" of experimentation, and cultivating students' abilities and promoting human subjectivity have become the main themes of current educational reform[8].

Abroad, medieval universities focused on scripture reading, but during the Renaissance, the establishment of the Academia Minima, the introduction of lectures and the rise of experimental teaching gradually emerged, and since the 20th century, open-ended teaching and cooperative teaching have gradually emerged [9]. Since the 20th century, American universities have seen the rise of three models of classroom teaching reform: "exemplary teaching," "interactive teaching," and "small group cooperative learning," which are composed of interactions between students and teachers, learning partners, and learning resources[10]. Since then, a large number of new teaching methods such as technology preparation, curriculum integration, work-based apprenticeships, career colleges, school-based enterprises, and cooperative education have become the new paradigm for vocational education in the United States[11]. Germany's "dual system" vocational education has cultivated a large number of highly skilled talent for the German economy[12]. It implements joint education by the two main bodies of school and enterprise, combining and supplementing school theoretical learning and enterprise production practice, and seamlessly switching between campus students and enterprise employees, etc., which has become one of the templates for China's vocational education reform. The school-enterprise cooperation of Australia's TAFE colleges has established a four-party linkage mechanism involving the government, industry, enterprises and schools, introduced a market mechanism, improved social service capabilities, and created a new model for teacher development.

Overall, current research on vocational education pedagogy and reform at home and abroad has achieved some results. In particular, with the introduction and promotion of the national "three-in-one" education reform, the content and perspectives of related research have shown a rising trend of diversification, providing methodological references and reference conclusions for this topic. However, at present, the research conducted by domestic and foreign scholars on tiered teaching is still rather fragmented, especially the research on catering to all students, especially groups and individuals with weaker academic performance and poor conditions, as well as the integrated innovation and individual innovation of teaching methods, which have not yet formed a system. This is reflected in the lack of in-depth theoretical research and scattered research, which is far from being able to meet the requirements of adapting to the high-quality development of vocational education.

4. Analysis of the Current Situation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Vocational Education in the Context of Diversified Student Sources

This paper uses a questionnaire survey as the main research tool to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current situation of ideological and political theory courses in higher vocational education in the context of diversified student sources. It covers multiple dimensions such as students' learning habits and educational backgrounds, teaching needs and satisfaction, and perceptions and attitudes towards ideological and political theory courses. It covers students from different regions, different higher vocational colleges, different majors, different grades and different places of origin. 146 questionnaires were distributed via WeChat or by logging in to an online platform on a computer. 146 valid and anonymous questionnaires were collected in the end, with a 100% effective rate, which meets the data sample requirements for the survey questionnaire. The collected data was processed and analyzed using statistical software, including frequency analysis, cross-analysis and other methods, to reveal the relationships and trends between variables. The analysis of the questionnaire data found that the theoretical courses on ideological and political education in higher vocational colleges, against the background of the diverse student body, present the following characteristics:

4.1. The Student Body is Widely Distributed and Significantly Different

Among the 146 valid questionnaires, 23.29% of the students came from cities, 68.49% from rural areas, and 8.22% from the urban-rural fringe. This geographical distribution shows that higher vocational college students mainly come from rural areas and the urban-rural fringe, and there may be significant differences in cultural background and living habits compared to urban students. These differences may be reflected in the different levels of exposure to urban culture, modern technology, and international perspectives, as well as in their needs and expectations in terms of learning and living.

4.2. Diverse Ethnic Composition and Significant Cultural Integration

Han students account for 95.21%, while minority students account for 4.79%. Although minority students account for a relatively small proportion, their presence adds a unique color and vitality to campus culture. The cultural traditions and holiday customs brought by minority students not only enrich campus culture, but also provide content and materials for multicultural education in ideological and political theory courses.

4.3. Diverse Educational Backgrounds and Uneven Learning Foundations

The educational backgrounds of the students include 42.47% from regular high schools, 21.92% from vocational high schools, and 35.62% from secondary vocational schools (technical schools). This diversity leads to differences in students' knowledge base, learning methods, and learning habits. For example, students from regular high schools may pay more attention to theoretical knowledge, while students from vocational high schools and secondary vocational

schools (technical schools) may pay more attention to practical operations and the cultivation of vocational skills.

4.4. Diverse Learning Habits and Needs, Highlighting the Need for Personalized Teaching

In terms of learning habits, 36.3% of students prefer independent learning, 38.36% prefer group cooperation, and 25.34% prefer a combination of online and offline methods. This diversity requires teachers to pay more attention to teaching students according to their aptitude in the teaching process. Students' demand for ideological and political theory courses also presents diverse characteristics. For example, 76.03% of students believe that the course should pay more attention to practical application and case analysis, and 73.97% of students hope to strengthen multicultural and values education.

4.5. Learning Challenges and Expectations Coexist, and Teaching Reform is Imperative

The biggest challenges students face when learning ideological and political theory courses include the difficulty of understanding theoretical knowledge (66.44%), the disconnect between course content and reality (40.41%), and the use of a single teaching method (52.05%). In the face of these challenges, students generally expect the courses to pay more attention to practical application, incorporate multicultural elements, and improve the interactivity and interest of the teaching methods. For example, 52.05% of students believe that the curriculum should pay more attention to the systematic explanation of theoretical knowledge, but at the same time, 76.03% of students hope to strengthen practical application and case analysis.

This shows that the current situation of diversified enrollment in higher vocational colleges has put forward higher requirements for the teaching of ideological and political theory courses. Teachers should deeply analyze the characteristics and learning needs of students, formulate

Table 1. The “two-part, two-loop, six-step” design of “layered learning assistance” for higher vocational college ideological and political theory courses

Section	Self-study in layers (about 30%)		Layered learning support (about 70%)			
Step	Layered self-study	layered problem-solving	layered teaching	layered discussion	Layered practice	layered assessment
Teacher's task	Learning situation survey	View Self-study	Teaching in layers	Layered point of view	Demonstration of objects	In-class testing
	Negotiating tasks	Self-study assessment	Demonstrating in layers	Layered guidance	Task-driven	Analysis and summary
	Guided learning with levels	Troubleshooting	Assigning homework	Layered review	Service-driven	Instant feedback
Student's task	Completing questionnaires	Take the assessment	Understanding	Questioning	Understanding knowledge	Self-assessment and peer assessment
	Obtaining information	Feedback questions	Observing	Interaction	Applying new knowledge	Evaluation feedback
	Self-study	Solve difficulties	Completing homework	Internalization and assimilation	Integrating knowledge with action	Reflect Sand improve

“Layered learning support” is based on the transformation and upgrading of the ‘learning support classroom’. It is learner-centered, and focuses on the classroom structure, process, and steps to carry out classroom reform in ‘two divisions, two loops, and six steps’ (Table 1). ‘Two divisions’ refers to the classroom structure, which, based on students' cognitive characteristics and the content of the teaching,

targeted teaching plans and programs, pay attention to teaching students according to their aptitude and individualized teaching, so as to meet the diverse learning needs and development expectations of students.

5. Strategies and Paths for Reforming the Teaching Methods of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Higher Vocational Education in the Context of Diversified Student Sources

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized at the symposium for teachers of ideological and political theory courses in schools that “ideological and political theory courses are key courses for implementing the fundamental task of cultivating people with integrity. Ideological and political theory courses in higher vocational education are not only a compulsory course for students, but also an important course for guiding students to become adults and succeed .The “helping learning classroom” proposed by the famous national vocational education expert, researcher Ouyang He, insists that internal factors are the fundamental driving force behind the development of things, and allows students to actively participate in the process of meaning construction. The transformation from “learning with me” to “learning with you” is achieved through the integration of student behavior, overall planning and classification, communication with others, etc. This has a strong inspirational effect on the reform of teaching methods for higher vocational ideological and political theory courses.

5.1. Strategy for Reforming the Teaching Methods for Higher Vocational Ideological and Political Theory Courses: “Two Divisions, Two Rings, Six Steps” “Layered Learning Support”

reasonably divides the teaching content and time into two parts to ensure that students at each level can receive appropriate teaching attention. However, this proportion is appropriately adjusted according to the situation of different students. “Two loops” refers to the process of dividing the classroom into two parts: self-study and help. This ensures that students have space for independent learning, while also

providing the necessary help and support. For students with a weaker foundation, the proportion of help will definitely be higher, while for students with a stronger foundation, the proportion of self-study will be appropriately increased. “Six steps” refers to the six steps involved, layered self-study, layered problem-solving, layered teaching, layered discussion, layered practice, layered assessment, a process that also takes full account of the actual situation of different students.

5.2. The Path Chosen by the Teacher under the Guidance of “Layered Learning Support”

The reform of “layered help learning” in higher vocational ideological and political theory courses is not only the starting point for the transformation of teachers’ “layered self-study”, but also the starting point for stimulating students’ endogenous learning motivation. Teachers use detailed “learning surveys” to gain a comprehensive understanding of students’ knowledge base, learning styles, interests and hobbies, etc. They “negotiate tasks” with students, decompose the tasks of ideological and political courses, and create differentiated “self-study tasks” for different students. In this process, teachers not only provide students with a wealth of learning resources, such as cases, videos, and documents, but also participate in and help students complete independent learning by checking and solving problems, that is, “tiered help”. “Layered help learning” accounts for a higher proportion than ‘layered self-study’ and is a core aspect of pedagogical change that embodies the ‘student-centered’ teaching philosophy. Teachers should group students according to their knowledge base, learning ability, comprehension ability, desire to learn, etc., and carry out differentiated and targeted teaching for different groups. In the “layered teaching” session, for general high school students, teachers can focus more on the systematic and logical nature of knowledge; while for students from vocational schools or the community, teachers can arouse students’ thinking and attention through vivid examples and classic anecdotes. In the “layered discussion” session, teachers should encourage students to speak actively, express their opinions and ask questions, and teachers should provide different points of view, guidance and comments.

5.3. “Layered Learning Support” Guides Students in Choosing Their Path

Different learning tasks are designed for students at different levels. Students with a stronger foundation can choose more challenging tasks, while students with a weaker foundation can choose basic tasks. Before class, students preview and record their learning insights and questions, so that they can discuss them with the teacher and classmates in class. During class, students from the same source can be divided into groups, and group members can fully discuss their doubts or insights in the self-study process with their classmates. For students with a better foundation, they can ask more in-depth questions to guide the discussion to a deeper level; while students with a weaker foundation can deepen their understanding of the knowledge points through simple questions or discussions. The teacher gives targeted explanations based on the main issues that each group has fed back during the discussion to ensure that different students can internalize and absorb the main knowledge points. In the practical part of the differentiated teaching, students should choose practical tasks that suit their own actual situation,

consolidate the knowledge they have learned through practice, and achieve unity of knowledge and action. After class, students should review and summarize in time, participate in classroom evaluation or testing, and reflect on the course.

6. Conclusion

This paper adopts research methods such as literature research and questionnaire surveys to conduct an in-depth study on the teaching method reform of ideological and political theory courses against the background of the diversification of higher vocational student sources. It is found that the adoption of a differentiated teaching method can improve the teaching effect and quality of students from different sources in higher vocational colleges. Not only has it deepened our understanding of the importance of teaching reform, but it has also provided a meaningful reference for higher vocational colleges in the teaching of ideological and political theory courses or other disciplines. Although this paper has certain limitations in terms of verifying the actual effectiveness of tiered learning support, it has laid an important foundation for follow-up research. Future research can further explore the possibilities of tiered learning support to more comprehensively reveal more teaching methods that meet the needs of students from different backgrounds. We look forward to future research continuing to promote the development of this field and make a greater contribution to educational reform.

Acknowledgments

Project Funding: Project Funding: Guangdong Provincial Education Science Planning Project "Research and Practice on the Adaptability of Teaching Methods in Vocational Education under the Background of Diversified Student Sources" (Project No. 2022GXJK624, Project Leader: Xu Pingfan); Leading Group Office of Guangdong Provincial Philosophy and Social Science Planning "Empowering the Moral Education System of Large, Medium and Small Schools in Beautiful Guangdong and Optimizing Their Collaborative Mechanisms" (Project No. GD22XXY06, Project Leader: Wang Wenbin).

References

- [1] Department of Vocational and Adult Education, Ministry of Education. Relevant information on the Implementation Plan for the Special Work of Expanding Enrollment in Higher Vocational Education [EB/OL]. (2019-05-08) [2024-11-15]. http://www.moe.gov.cn/fbh/live/2019/50620/sfc1/201905/t20190508_381005.html
- [2] Shoubin Wang. How to Face the Million Enrollment Expansion in Higher Vocational Education [N]. China Education Daily, 2019-03-12(9).
- [3] Xinhua News Agency. How to recruit and implement the 2 million yuan expansion of vocational education enrollment [N]. China Education Daily, 2020-05-25(1).
- [4] Peng Chen. The development of national education in 2023 is predicted by 'numbers' [N]. Guangming Daily, 2024-03-02(4).
- [5] Zhen Xu. How to Improve the Teaching Effect of Higher Mathematics Classroom [J]. PR Magazine, 2019, (09): 139.
- [6] Limei Wang. The Process, Experience, and Direction of Teaching Method Reform in China [J]. Teaching & Administration, 2010, (01): 5-7.

- [7] Tianming Gao.On the Dilemma of School Education Ideals and the Modernization of Teaching Methods[J].Theory and Practice of Education, 2001, (07): 36-39.
- [8] Junping Wen.Research on Evolution of Teaching Styles and Teaching Methods in Western Higher Education [J]. Contemporary Education and Culture, 2019, 11 (05): 43-52.
- [9] Minna Zhao.Exploration of Three Typical Classroom Teaching Models in American Universities: Taking Educational Courses as an Example[J].International and Comparative Education, 2004, (04): 11-15.
- [10] Guoqing Xu.The Challenges and Countermeasures in the Current Curriculum Reform of Higher Vocational Education[J]. Jiangsu Higher Education, 2008, (04): 124-126.
- [11] Dayuan Jiang.Re interpretation of Germany's "Dual System" Vocational Education[J]. Chinese Vocational and Technical Education, 2013, (33): 5-14.
- [12] Zhengfu Song.From the perspective of school enterprise cooperation, Germany's "dual system" education and its reference to China's higher vocational education[J].China Higher Education, 2018, (23): 61-62.
- [13] He Ouyang .Helping Learning Classroom:The Classroom Revolution from "Following me" to "Helping you Learn"[J]. Journal of Vocational Education, 2021, 37(01):49-55.