The Impact and Pathway of Ideological and Political Courses on College Students' Ideals and Beliefs An Empirical Analysis Based on Structural Equation Modeling

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ABSTRACT. Ideals and beliefs are the concentrated embodiment of college students' development goals and directions. College students who possess both virtue and talent and are both morally upright and professionally competent can become the new generation capable of assuming great responsibilities in society. Therefore, it is worth exploring whether the construction of the course of ideological and political education can have a positive impact on the education of college students' ideals and beliefs. Based on a questionnaire survey of 1,178 students from eight Double First-Class universities in Sichuan Province, a structural equation model was established to analyze the survey results. The results show that overall, college students have a good political ideal and belief status. The course of ideological and political education has a significant positive influence on college students' ideals and beliefs in life, moral ideals and beliefs, and political ideals and beliefs. Among them, the influence on political ideals and beliefs is the greatest. However, it also reflects that the current course of ideological and political education still needs to be strengthened in meeting the requirements of the times and improving the quality and effectiveness of ideal and belief education.

Keywords: course of ideological and political education, college students, ideals and beliefs, structural equation model, empirical analysis

1. Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has attached great importance to cultivating the ideals and beliefs of young college students. Guided by the ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, the cultivation of young college students aims to nurture a new generation capable of shouldering the great responsibility of national rejuvenation, requiring them to possess solid professional competence and firm ideals and beliefs. In 2020, the Ministry of Education clearly stated in the "Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions" that ideological and political education should become the "core content" of the education system in universities, gradually establishing a comprehensive and all-encompassing system to help students shape their correct values[1].

Strengthening the education of college students' ideals and beliefs is not only a prerequisite for guiding their healthy growth and success but also a political requirement for the sustainable development of the Party and the country[2]. Therefore, it is essential to examine whether the current promotion of ideological and political education in the curriculum has had a positive impact on the establishment of college students' ideals and beliefs. What is the connection between ideological and political education and the ideals and beliefs of college students? And what is the improvement path based on the causal relationship and inherent interactive mechanisms between them? This article explores the above-mentioned questions to provide suggestions for the empowerment and improvement of curriculum-based ideological and political education and the education of college students' ideals and beliefs.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Problem Statement

The understanding of curriculum-based ideological and political education by college students is closely related to their expression of ideals and beliefs. However, the construction of ideological and political education in universities does not directly affect the education of college students' ideals and beliefs. It also involves multiple important factors, such as integrating correct concepts into the curriculum, understanding of ideals and beliefs, and improving the effectiveness of curriculum-based ideological and political education[3] . Based on these fundamental elements, this study proposes the following research questions:

Firstly, from the perspective of educational practice in curriculum-based ideological and political education, how does the expression of life ideals, moral ideals, and political ideals relate to the integration of correct concepts into the curriculum and the improvement of curriculum-based ideological and political education? How does the educational practice of curriculum-based ideological and political education influence the degree and manner in which college students' ideals and beliefs are affected?

Secondly, when examining the relationship between the various elements of curriculum-based ideological and political education and the different dimensions of college students' ideals and beliefs, it is important to consider not only the direct impact of formal interactions but also the indirect and concealed relationships between them. What are the causal characteristics of the relationship between the construction of curriculum-based ideological and political education and college students' ideals and beliefs?

Based on these research questions, we can make hypotheses regarding the relationship between curriculum-based ideological and political education and college students' ideals and beliefs.

2.1.1. Understanding of Curriculum-based Ideological and Political Education

In this study, understanding of curriculum-based ideological and political education refers to college students' understanding of this educational practice. It explores how students' understanding of curriculum-based ideological and political education influences the integration of correct concepts into the curriculum and whether the practice of curriculum-based ideological and political education improves the quality and effectiveness of

ideals and beliefs education[4] . Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed(Fig 1 Theoretical Model of Research Hypotheses):

H$_1$: The degree of students' understanding of curriculum-based ideological and political education has a positive impact on the integration of correct concepts into the curriculum.

H$_2$: The degree of students' understanding of curriculum-based ideological and political education has a positive impact on the improvement of curriculum-based ideological and political education.

2.1.2. Understanding of Ideals and Beliefs

College students' ideals and beliefs refer to their aspirations and pursuits for the future, reflecting their values and political awareness in personal goals. There are multiple factors influencing college students' understanding of ideals and beliefs, but this study only focuses on two factors under the understanding of curriculum-based ideological and political education. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H$_3$: The integration of correct concepts into the curriculum has a positive impact on the understanding of ideals and beliefs.

H$_4$: The improvement of curriculum-based ideological and political education has a positive impact on the understanding of ideals and beliefs.

2.1.3. Performance of Ideals and Beliefs

College students' ideals and beliefs are manifested in various aspects of life, morality, and politics. The theoretical and practical factors influencing the specific expression of college students' ideals and beliefs are complex, but this study specifically focuses on the three factors mentioned above[5]. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H$_5$: The integration of correct concepts into the curriculum has a positive impact on the performance of ideals and beliefs.

H$_6$: The improvement of understanding of ideals and beliefs has a positive impact on the performance of ideals and beliefs.

H$_7$: The improvement of curriculum-based ideological and political education has a positive impact on the performance of ideals and beliefs.
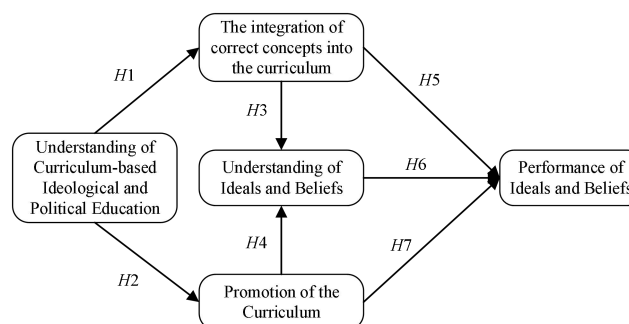

Fig 1 Theoretical Model of Research Hypotheses

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Subjects

This study selected undergraduate and master's students from seven Double First-Class universities in Chengdu, China, covering six major disciplines, including humanities, natural sciences, engineering, business, medicine, and arts. A total of 1,300 questionnaires were distributed both online and offline, and 1,178 valid questionnaires were collected, resulting in a response rate of 90.62%. Among the participants, there were 513 male students and 665 female students.

3.2. Research Instruments and Methods

In this study, based on Xi Jinping's discourse on ideals and beliefs, an Ideal and Belief Scale was designed, consisting of four dimensions: cognitive understanding of ideals and beliefs, life ideals and beliefs, moral ideals and beliefs, and political ideals and beliefs. It included a total of 17 items. Drawing on the value implications of integrating the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China into curriculum-based ideological and political education by Pu Qingping and Huang Yuanyuan (2022), a Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education Scale was developed, encompassing three dimensions: cognitive understanding of curriculum-based ideological and political education, integration of correct concepts into the curriculum, and improvement of curriculum-based ideological and political education. It included a total of 15 items. Each dimension was measured using a five-point Likert scale[6] . The study employed both online and offline questionnaire surveys to collect data and utilized SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 24.0 to construct a structural equation model for data analysis.

3.3. Latent Variables and Measurements

This study defined nine latent variables corresponding to the nine dimensions of the measurement scales. They were: cognitive understanding of ideals and beliefs (IDEAL), life ideals and beliefs (LIFE), moral ideals and beliefs (MORA), political ideals and beliefs (POLIT), cognitive understanding of curriculum-based ideological and political education (RECOG), integration of correct concepts into the curriculum (TEACH), and improvement of curriculum-based ideological and political education (PROM). Each latent variable corresponded to 3-7 observed items. The specific information on the observed items for the seven latent variables can be obtained from Table 1, and all measurement items were positively oriented indicators.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1. Model Verification

4.1.1. Measurement Model Verification

In this study, reliability is tested using Cronbach's α coefficient and composite reliability (CR) as criteria, while validity is analyzed using convergent validity and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's α coefficients are all above 0.8, the CR values are all greater

than 0.7, and the average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.5 for each construct. Additionally, the standardized loadings for each measurement item are all above 0.5, indicating that the reliability of the measurement model is at a good level. The internal consistency of the measurement data is high, and the convergent validity of the measurement model is at a high level. As shown in Table 2, the AVE values are greater than the squared correlation coefficients between latent variables, indicating that the measurement model has good discriminant validity.

To simplify the research model, the ideal belief performance variables are constructed from three dimensions: Life Ideal Belief (LIFE), Moral Ideal Belief (MORA), and Political Ideal Belief (POLIT). The specific implementation method is the equal-weighted sum.

Table 1 Testing of Measurement Model Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Observations	Standardized Loading	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Ideal Belief (IDEAL)	Often contemplate personal and social ideal beliefs	0.541	0.809	0.822	0.613
	Recognize the necessity of educating ideal beliefs	0.863			
	Acknowledge the importance of ideal beliefs	0.960			
Life Ideal (LIFE)	Have clear ideal goals and life plans	0.764	0.904	0.910	0.718
	Believe that ideal beliefs serve as a source of motivation for life	0.774			
	Strive towards ideal goals and firmly believe in their achievability	0.919			
	Embrace challenges and setbacks in the process of ideal pursuit	0.918			
Moral Ideal (MORA)	Believe in the importance of possessing good moral and ethical qualities	0.794	0.882	0.892	0.683
	Advocate for equal, honest, and friendly relationships among people	0.746			
	Prioritize collective interests over personal interests	0.841			
	Practice one's own moral cognition in practical situations	0.876			
Political Ideal (POLIT)	Believe that college students can only develop better by establishing	0.822	0.952	0.957	0.794

Construct	Observations	Standardized Loading	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
	correct political beliefs				
	Actively strive to join the Communist Youth League of China and the Communist Party of China	0.929			
	Firmly uphold the authority and centralized leadership of the Party Central Committee	0.900			
	Have a deep emotional identification with the country and nation	0.689			
	Identify with the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological field of our country	0.966			
	Have confidence in the road, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics	0.947			
Cognitive aspects of ideological and political education in the curriculum (RECOG)	Clear understanding of the concept of "course-related political education"	0.647	0.900	0.908	0.716
	Approve of schools implementing course-related political education	0.904			
	Recognize the necessity of integrating political content into university courses	0.893			
	Believe that course-related political education has a significant impact	0.909			
Integration of Correct Concepts into Curriculum (TEACH)	Educate students to identify and adhere to Party leadership	0.890	0.979	0.979	0.872
	Guide students to firmly uphold national interests	0.943			
	Inspire students with a sense of mission to learn for the country and the nation	0.929			
	Enhance students' proactive engagement in national development	0.943			
	Guide students to integrate personal ideals with the future and destiny of the	0.968			

Construct	Observations	Standardized Loading	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
	nation				
	Promote the spirit of benefiting the society and embracing dedication	0.922			
	Guide students to provide advanced technology in various fields of society	0.949			
Promotion of the Curriculum (PROM)	Help students form new perspectives and ways of thinking	0.909	0.954	0.954	0.839
	Guide students to develop a preference for seeking novelty and diversity	0.939			
	Cultivate students' scientific research spirit	0.899			
	Utilize new teaching methods to enhance classroom participation and interaction	0.920			

Table 2 Test of Discriminant Validity for the Measurement Model

Items	IDEAL	LIFE	MORA	POLIT	RECOG	TEACH	PROM
IDEAL	0.613						
LIFE	0.407	0.718					
MORA	0.472	0.264	0.683				
POLIT	0.477	0.207	0.672	0.794			
RECOG	0.531	0.314	0.629	0.604	0.716		
TEACH	0.362	0.151	0.464	0.733	0.621	0.872	
PROM	0.383	0.202	0.497	0.728	0.643	0.780	0.839

4.1.2. Structural Model Testing

To avoid improper estimation, two conditions need to be satisfied: First, there should be no negative values for measurement errors in the model. Second, the standardized coefficients should exceed or be very close to 1. Model fitting and testing can only be conducted when these conditions are met.

The causal path diagram of the model was constructed using the AMOS software, and the estimation was performed using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The model fit was evaluated using various fit indices, including the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the incremental fit index (IFI), the normed fit index (NFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the parsimonious goodness-of-fit index (PGFI), and the parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI). The results, presented in Table 3, demonstrate that all fit indices for the research model exceed the critical values, indicating good fit validity for the structural model.

Please note that the translation provided is a general understanding of the text. For accurate interpretation, it is recommended to refer to the original source material.

Table 3 Fit Indices for the Structural Model

Fit Indices	Index	Reference Standards	Observed Results
Absolute Fit	CMIN/DF	Excellent: 1-3, Good: 3-5	3.815
	RMSEA	Excellent: <0.05, Good: <0.08	0.069
Incremental Fit	IFI	Excellent: >0.9, Good: >0.8	0.928
	NFI	Excellent: >0.9, Good: >0.8	0.917
	CFI	Excellent: >0.9, Good: >0.8	0.928
Parsimonious Fit	PGFI	Excellent: >0.5	0.723
	PNFI	Excellent: >0.5	0.717

4.1.3. Hypothesis Testing

In this study, structural equation modeling analysis was conducted using AMOS software to test the research model hypotheses. The results in Table 4 show that course ideological cognition has a positive and significant impact on the integration of correct concepts into the curriculum ($\beta=0.237$, $p<0.01$) and the improvement of course ideological quality ($\beta=0.341$, $p<0.01$). The integration of correct concepts into the curriculum ($\beta=0.202$, $p<0.01$) and the improvement of course ideological quality ($\beta=0.134$, $p<0.01$) both have a positive impact on ideal belief cognition. Additionally, the integration of correct concepts into the curriculum ($\beta=0.382$, $p<0.01$), ideal belief cognition ($\beta=0.432$, $p<0.01$), and the improvement of course ideological quality ($\beta=0.397$, $p<0.01$) all have positive effects on the manifestation of ideal beliefs. Therefore, hypotheses H1-H7 are supported. It can be observed that the manifestation of college students' ideal beliefs is directly and indirectly influenced by the effects of integrating correct concepts into the curriculum and improving the quality of course ideological education, with the indirect influence occurring through the mediation of ideal belief cognition.

Table 4 Significance Test of Structural Model Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Causal Relationship	Standardized Path Coefficient	t-value	Positive Significance
H1	Course Ideology Cognition → Incorporating Correct Ideas into Courses	0.237	12.377	Positive
H2	Course Ideology Cognition → Enhancing the Quality of Course Ideology	0.341	7.898	Positive
H3	Incorporating Correct Ideas into Courses → Ideology Cognition	0.202	9.989	Positive
H4	Enhancing the Quality of Course Ideology → Ideology Cognition	0.134	3.311	Positive
H5	Incorporating Correct Ideas into Courses → Ideology Performance	0.382	13.884	Positive
H6	Ideology Cognition → Ideology Performance	0.432	17.399	Positive
H7	Enhancing the Quality of Course Ideology → Ideology Performance	0.397	8.035	Positive

4.2. Analysis of the Impact of Course Ideological Education on College Students' Ideological Beliefs

Based on the previous analysis of the structural equation model, an impact model of course ideological education on college students' ideological beliefs is depicted. As shown in Figure 2, the effects of course ideology cognition on incorporating correct ideas into courses and enhancing the quality of course ideology are 0.237 and 0.341, respectively. This indicates that college students with a clearer understanding of course ideology cognition are more likely to benefit from course ideological education.

The total effect of incorporating correct ideas into courses on ideological belief performance is 0.469 (0.382 + 0.202 × 0.432), and the total effect of enhancing the quality of course ideology on ideological belief performance is 0.455 (0.397 + 0.134 × 0.432). This suggests that both the effect of incorporating correct ideas into courses and the effect of enhancing the quality of course ideology have a strong positive influence on college students' ideological belief performance. Among them, the effect of incorporating correct ideas into courses is slightly greater than the effect of enhancing the quality of course ideology. Therefore, the primary task of course ideological education for college students is to improve their awareness of course ideology. To achieve better ideological belief performance, it is necessary to enhance students' understanding of ideological beliefs.

The paths of idea incorporation and quality enhancement, designed in this study, are both significant ways through which course ideological education influences ideological belief performance. Therefore, both paths play an important role in course ideological reform and the promotion of ideological belief education among college students.
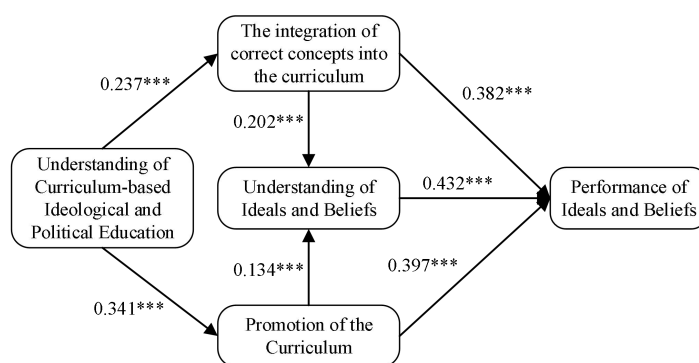

Figure 2 The Impact Model of Course Ideological Education on College Students' Ideological Beliefs

5. Conclusion and Implications

Firstly, the construction of course ideological education has a significant impact on college students' ideological beliefs. Specifically, the clear understanding of course ideological education, achieved through the integration of correct concepts into the curriculum and the enhancement of the quality and effectiveness of course ideological education, has a positive and significant influence on college students' ideological beliefs. This influence is mediated by

the mediating variable of ideological belief cognition, which indirectly affects the manifestation of ideological beliefs. Secondly, college students' understanding of course ideological education has a significant positive impact on the integration of correct concepts into the curriculum and the enhancement of the quality and effectiveness of course ideological education. Thirdly, ideological belief cognition has a significant positive impact on the manifestation of ideological beliefs, and its direct impact is the most prominent, serving as a significant factor in the influence of course ideological education on college students' ideological belief education[7].

The study suggests that universities should fully understand the practical mechanism of course ideological education's influence on college students' ideological beliefs. They should adhere to the rational path of respecting the disciplinary characteristics of different professional courses, achieving a harmonious coexistence between professional courses and ideological and political education, and combining the implementation of the "comprehensive education" principle with the characteristics of different disciplines[8]. In practice, universities should adhere to ideological guidance, identify the key points of guiding college students, optimize teaching content, and develop curriculum modules that cater to the characteristics of college students, while giving full play to the subjective initiative of contemporary college students. Careful lesson preparation, targeted design of teaching content, the use of scientific teaching methods and tools, and the development of a diversified teaching evaluation system should be employed to provide timely responses to students' needs.

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