



Research on the Practical Pathways for Ideological and Belief Education in Higher Vocational Education Based on the Three-Dimensional Integration of Curriculum, Practice and Culture

—Taking Nantong as an Example

Bin Cai*, Jingjing Ji, Xiaojun Xu

Nantong Open University, Nantong, China

*Corresponding author: 1764727176@qq.com

Abstract. In the context of imparting education pertaining to ideals and convictions, higher vocational institutions frequently encounter the challenge of disjointed coursework, practical components, and cultural immersion. This disconnection has the potential to directly compromise the efficacy of educational outcomes. In order to address this issue, an attempt has been made to construct a three-dimensional framework integrating "curriculum, practice, and culture". The overarching objective of this framework is threefold: firstly, to consolidate value recognition through curricula; secondly, to drive the transformation of knowledge into action via practice; and thirdly, to foster an immersive atmosphere through culture. The objective of the present text is to align the objectives and ensure the coherence of content across these three dimensions, ultimately forming a synergistic whole. A case study of Nantong, Jiangsu, systematically organised local resources to demonstrate the region's status as the 'First City of Modern China', drawing on the city's red history, the spiritual legacy of Zhang Jian's 'industrial patriotism', and distinctive industrial cultures. Utilising these resources as a foundation, we embark on a subsequent exploration of concrete pathways through which these resources can be transformed into educational content. These include the design of integrated theoretical-practical curricula, the establishment of platforms that foster unity of knowledge and action, the cultivation of a subtly nurturing cultural environment, and the implementation of coordinated mechanisms to ensure synergistic objectives.

Keywords: Higher vocational colleges, Ideological and belief education, Three-dimensional integration, Nantong regional culture, Industry-education integration.

1 Introduction

Ideological and belief education is considered to be the fundamental component of political and ideological education [1]. The fundamental values and spiritual orienta-

tion of technical and skilled personnel are of paramount importance, and the fundamental question of vocational education is directly addressed: for whom are we cultivating talent? General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasised the importance of young people having lofty ideals and firm convictions, stating that they can become an indomitable driving force that can propel a nation and its people forward. Consequently, higher vocational education must evolve beyond the confines of mere knowledge and skill transmission. It is imperative that value guidance is integrated with competency development in a holistic manner to ensure the attainment of educational objectives. However, in practical implementation, higher vocational institutions still encounter challenges in seamlessly integrating ideological and belief education across curricula, practical training, and cultural contexts. This hinders the full realisation of educational effectiveness.

In this regard, the present study focuses on higher vocational institutions in the Nantong region, analysing the principal challenges encountered in practice and their underlying causes. The objective of this study is to provide insights and strategies that are pertinent to the regional context, with a focus on addressing prevalent issues in the realm of vocational education. These issues pertain to the cultivation of ideology and belief systems, including the disconnection between knowledge and its application, as well as the division between academic and cultural education.

2 Core Conceptual Definitions and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Core Concept Definition

2.1.1 Ideological and Belief Education for Higher Vocational Students.

Ideological and Belief Education for Higher Vocational Students is a specialised educational initiative that is delivered within higher vocational institutions [3]. The objective of this initiative is to facilitate the development of a robust faith in Marxism among students, thereby consolidating their conviction in socialism with Chinese characteristics and enhancing their confidence in the process of national rejuvenation.

2.1.2 Integration of Curriculum, Practice and Culture.

The integration of curriculum, practice and culture in three dimensions constitutes an educational model designed to enhance the effectiveness of ideological and belief education in higher vocational institutions. The programme under discussion emphasises the seamless interconnection of theoretical instruction, practical experience and cultural immersion through holistic design and coordinated mechanisms.

The curriculum's fundamental objective is to cultivate "understanding of principles", encompassing both ideological and political courses, with a view to integrating ideological and political education throughout the curriculum. The crux of the issue lies in the transformation of systematic theoretical knowledge into learning content that is closely relevant to students' professional backgrounds and future career development.

The crux of the matter lies in the steadfast implementation of the aforementioned principles. It is evident that students are provided with the opportunity to engage with authentic real-world contexts through a variety of activities. Active participation in the curriculum is conducive to the progressive comprehension and internalisation of its knowledge and values, thereby facilitating a deepening process from cognitive understanding to personal conviction, culminating in conscious action.

The role of culture is predicated on its capacity to shape individuals[10]. The integration of campus, regional and professional cultures fosters an immersive environment conducive to personal development through various settings, rituals and exemplary narratives.

The profound significance of 'integration' lies in the need to transcend the mechanical juxtaposition or simple succession of curriculum, practice and culture, and to construct a multidimensional educational cycle that combines theoretical interpretation, experiential learning and the immersion in meaning. The curriculum infuses practice and culture with a sense of purpose; practice, in turn, serves as the contextualised unfolding of the curriculum's content and a practical test of cultural values; whilst culture creates the necessary field of meaning for both the curriculum and practice, thereby fostering the internalisation and consolidation of values.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

2.2.1 Marxist Theory of the Comprehensive Development of Human Beings.

According to Marxist theory, the fundamental task of education is to enable individuals to realise their full potential in a comprehensive manner, that is to say, as complete human beings possessing their entire essence [11]. This assertion underscores the imperative for higher vocational education to transcend the confines of mere skills training, instead emphasising the comprehensive development of students as individuals.

2.2.2 The concept of the 'Grand Ideological and Political Education Course'.

The concept of the "grand ideological and political education Course" emphasises the effective utilisation of societal resources to transcend the confines of traditional classrooms. It seeks to integrate small-scale classroom instruction, broader societal learning environments, and online cloud-based platforms, thereby constructing an open, interconnected educational ecosystem. Consequently, education on ideals and convictions should not be confined to the classroom but should proactively extend into wider spheres [2].

2.2.3 Constructivism and Experiential Learning Theory.

Constructivist learning theory posits that knowledge is not passively acquired, but rather actively constructed by learners through interpersonal collaboration and meaning-making within specific contexts [13]. Consequently, the authentic cultivation of ideals and convictions cannot be dependent upon a unidirectional process of indoctrination. Instead, it necessitates the creation of authentic or simulated environments for

students, to guide them in autonomously constructing their understanding of values through interaction, inquiry, and reflection.

David Kober's experiential learning theory places particular emphasis on the pivotal role of practice in cognitive transformation [12]. The proposed four-stage cycle of "experience, observation, generalisation, action" provides a clear delineation of the intrinsic process through which knowledge and action achieve unity.

3 The Nantong Approach to Integrating Curriculum, Practice and Culture: Analysis of Implementation and Challenges

3.1 Practical Exploration

In recent years, higher vocational institutions in the Nantong region have placed emphasis on integrating local cultural resources into their ideological and belief education programmes [4]. This approach has been progressively incorporated across all aspects of curriculum delivery, practical training, and cultural education, thereby establishing an initial three-dimensional framework that seamlessly integrates "curriculum, practice, and culture".

In terms of curriculum-based education, Jiangsu Maritime Vocational College established the 'Craftsmanship in Shipbuilding' major ideological and political practice teaching base at the China Merchants Industry Haimen Base, relocating courses such as 'Introduction to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' to the front lines of shipbuilding production. This pedagogical approach facilitates students' comprehension of the intrinsic interconnectedness between knowledge, skills, and values through experiential learning, thereby promoting their comprehensive development and aligning with Marxist tenets concerning holistic human growth. Meanwhile, Nantong Vocational University has undertaken an in-depth exploration of the spiritual essence of the local 'Construction Iron Army Culture,' seamlessly integrating its ideological components into multiple core courses within the construction engineering discipline cluster. This approach aims to achieve a profound integration of knowledge, skills, and value guidance. This approach aligns with the philosophy of 'comprehensive ideological and political education', emphasising that course-based ideological education should not be perceived as merely 'labelling' professional content. Instead, it is about identifying natural points of convergence between value cultivation and skill development within the discipline's logic. This approach ensures that value guidance becomes an intrinsic component of professional education, contributing to the holistic development of individuals in their chosen field.

In terms of practical education, Nantong Open University utilised the Nantong Hall of Eminent Figures to facilitate research-based learning for students enrolled in the Philosophy and Life course. Guided by interpreters, students embarked on a journey through history, tracing the footsteps of distinguished figures across dynasties within the narrative. This experience has been likened to embarking on a 'temporal voyage' and engaging in conversation with the past. Jiangsu Engineering Vocational and

Technical College capitalised on its specialised strengths by organising a volunteer team of fashion design students. The undertaking of innovative designs centred on Nantong's blue-printed cloth intangible cultural heritage was initiated, with the provision of solutions for local small-scale garment enterprises being a key objective. It is evident that, through this practice, students were able to refine their professional competencies. Furthermore, they gained a profound understanding of the societal significance of their chosen field.

With regard to the cultural education of the campus and the region, Nantong Health Vocational College emphasises integrating 'Zhang Jian's philanthropic spirit' with Nightingale's professional ethics. Beyond the establishment of themed cultural gardens, the organisation regularly conducts 'Compassionate Care Legacy' nursing practice activities. This reinforces the professional ethic of 'cherishing life' through daily environments and specific rituals, gradually internalising it as students' professional competence. Jiangsu Vocational College of Commerce has, moreover, drawn upon the region's 'modern industrial and commercial heritage' by recreating historical Nantong merchant establishments within its on-campus training facilities. The institution hosts a series of salons focused on the theme of commercial culture, with a particular emphasis on the concept of 'integrity in business'. This approach has the potential to transform the tradition of commercial integrity from historical narratives into tangible, discussable, and practicable scenarios. Consequently, values education transcends the realm of abstract instruction, forging an intrinsic connection with students' future professional conduct.

3.2 Analysis of Existing Issues and Their Causes

Despite the fact that academic institutions have embarked upon exploratory endeavours across the three dimensions of curriculum, practice and culture, the collective outcomes remain considerably short of the idealised effects of systemic collaboration and dynamic mutual reinforcement as conceptualised by the notion of "integration". Specifically, the following key issues persist in practice.

Firstly, the prevailing state of educational efforts is characterised by a pronounced fragmentation, devoid of systematic planning and effective coordination [7]. The conventional approach to curriculum development, practical activities, and cultural initiatives involves the management of these components by separate departments, namely teaching, student affairs, and publicity. This conventional approach is characterised by an absence of integration, with the result that the learning journey is not designed holistically with the core objective of 'cultivating both moral character and professional skills' as its central focus. Consequently, students are unable to either deepen their understanding through coursework or consolidate their identification within the cultural atmosphere. The educational impact of these activities diminishes rapidly after conclusion, hindering the internalisation of genuine value.

Secondly, the utilisation of regional resources is often superficial, lacking in-depth transformation [5]. Although local elements such as the Zhang Jian spirit and revolutionary heritage are frequently referenced, their application remains largely confined to the recounting of historical narratives or the organisation of museum visits. There is an

absence of meaningful connections between these spiritual legacies and the contemporary professional challenges and personal development issues faced by vocational students. Consequently, these valuable regional resources struggle to genuinely resonate with students.

Moreover, practical components frequently devolve into mere formalities, with students failing to engage sufficiently. It is evident that students are not provided with sufficient opportunities to engage with authentic problems as active participants, to collaborate in teams, or to resolve their own uncertainties. In such circumstances, while students may experience superficial novelty, they struggle to achieve the crucial transformation from sensory experience to rational conviction, or from external exposure to internalised belief. The historical imbalance of 'overemphasising instruction while undervaluing experience' may now evolve into a new predicament: 'experience exists, yet internalisation proves difficult.'

Overall, the root cause of the issues with the integration of theory and practice lies in a lack of systematic design. Curricula, practical training and campus culture are managed by different departments - such as Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Publicity - each with its own independent evaluation system and operational logic. The academic department assesses mastery of knowledge points, the practical training department focuses on meeting skill standards, and the student affairs department tracks the number of activities; yet there is a lack of regular communication and collaboration mechanisms, as well as a platform for resource sharing, between them. Without cross-departmental top-level design and institutional arrangements, any local optimisation in any dimension is unlikely to trigger overall synergistic effects. Consequently, 'curriculum, practice and culture' remain three parallel lines, unable to intertwine to form a three-dimensional network for nurturing students.

4 Constructing a Three-Dimensional Integration Approach for Curriculum, Practice and Culture

4.1 Establishing a Curriculum System Integrating Theory and Practice

The establishment of a curriculum system that integrates theory with practice is considered to be a crucial starting point for the internalisation of education on ideals and convictions [9]. The crux of curriculum reform is the dismantling of the longstanding knowledge divide between ideological and political courses and professional disciplines, with a view to bridging the latent gap between theoretical instruction and value guidance. This establishes a novel framework in which theoretical teaching and practice-oriented learning are profoundly integrated. The system aims to integrate value formation into knowledge transmission and skill development in a seamless manner, thereby establishing a foundation of rational understanding and deep emotional roots for students' cultivation of ideals and convictions.

The key to achieving this objective lies in organically integrating the curriculum content with vibrant local cultural resources and historical practices. For instance, in the context of teaching 'patriotism', it is imperative that instruction extends beyond

mere conceptual explanations. It is submitted that educators could systematically present Zhang Jian's comprehensive endeavours in establishing industry, education, and public welfare in Nantong, guiding students to comprehend the profound connection between personal choices and national destiny underlying the 'industrial salvation' movement. This transformation of patriotism from a conceptual notion to a tangible, emotionally resonant understanding is a significant development.

The integration of ideological and political education into coursework must be advanced continuously, striving to transition from mere embellishment to deep integration. It is incumbent upon educators to draw upon the distinctive knowledge characteristics of different disciplines in order to unearth the educational elements they embody, such as the spirit of craftsmanship and patriotic sentiment. For instance, within the core curriculum of the Ship Engineering Technology programme, a suitable integration of the developmental trajectory of China's shipbuilding industry - from its arduous origins to its emergence as a leading global power - alongside authentic portrayals of contemporary 'master craftsmen of the maritime nation' could be considered. Such integration should transcend mere case studies, instead revealing the national strategies and epochal missions embedded within the subject matter itself, while showcasing the concrete innovation processes and patriotic commitment underpinning these 'national treasures.'

4.2 Establishing a Practical Platform for the Unity of Knowledge and Action

The establishment of a practical platform that integrates knowledge with action is intended to guide students in transforming acquired knowledge into internalised convictions. Thematic research-based learning is posited as an effective pathway to achieve this objective. It is recommended that schools devise thematic research itineraries that are centred on the rich local resources of Nantong, including 'Red Heritage', 'Industrial Development for National Prosperity', and 'Rural Revitalisation'. It is recommended that these itineraries be formulated in such a manner that they establish organic links with sites including the Memorial Site of the Nantong Independent Branch of the Communist Party of China, Zhang Jian's Industrial Heritage Sites, representative local enterprises, and exemplary villages. The establishment of such links would result in the formation of a coherent educational landscape. In order for thematic study tours to produce tangible outcomes, it is essential that a holistic approach to design is employed. It is imperative that preliminary knowledge groundwork is integrated with the curriculum, that clear learning objectives are established during the process, and that in-depth reflection and summarisation are organised post-activity. Gradually, they come to comprehend and internalise the underlying values embedded within these experiences.

It is imperative to cultivate a sense of civic duty in students, encompassing the integration of professional competencies with tangible initiatives that contribute to societal benefit and the conservation of cultural heritage. The application of specialised knowledge to local service has been demonstrated to facilitate the development of students' understanding of social responsibility, thereby enabling them to construct

their own value systems autonomously. Furthermore, the integration of work placements, which offer an immersion in authentic production environments, facilitates the transformation of abstract concepts such as the 'craftsman spirit' and 'industrial prosperity for the nation' into personal professional identity and conscious life pursuits.

4.3 Cultivating a Cultural Ecosystem That Nurtures Subtly and Imperceptibly

At the level of material culture, the characteristics of a region, the revolutionary heritage, and the ideals and convictions of vocational higher education frequently resonate with one another in their value orientation [6]. The transformation of these cultural resources into tangible cultural symbols within the campus environment has been demonstrated to facilitate the strengthening of students' sense of cultural identity and belonging. For instance, public areas such as training centres, teaching buildings, corridors and stairwells could feature display boards and wall charts showcasing the stories and words of master craftsmen and model workers. This enables students to assimilate the influence of role models into their daily activities, thereby implicitly receiving a values-based nurturing process.

At the behavioural and cultural level, a series of cultural activities can be conducted on a regular basis. For instance, the school periodically organises an "Ethics Forum", inviting master craftsmen or inheritors of intangible cultural heritage who have risen from the front lines of local industries in Nantong to share their growth journeys of aligning personal expertise with national needs. This approach serves to mitigate any potential emotional dissonance between the subject and the student, thereby enhancing the persuasiveness of the exemplary role model.

In the context of online culture, concerted efforts must be made to cultivate a conducive environment for ideological and political education [8]. It is recommended that educational institutions consider producing a series of concise video recordings that focus on the historical significance of Nantong as the "first modern city", its distinctive river-sea culture, and its contemporary industrial development. These could be disseminated via official WeChat accounts. This pedagogical approach has the potential to provide a rich and authentic learning environment, facilitating the assimilation of local history and cultural knowledge through interactive and collaborative activities. Consequently, it would promote the organic integration of online and offline cultural education.

4.4 Create a Fusion Guarantee System of "Target Coordination"

To ensure the effective operation of the three-dimensional integration model of 'curriculum, practice and culture', the key lies in establishing and refining a collaborative education mechanism between the university and external partners. Specifically, external cultural scholars can leverage their professional expertise to provide theoretical underpinnings regarding local culture for the development of on-campus curricula; meanwhile, industry mentors can contribute practical experience from the front lines of their sectors, offering guidance on the optimisation and refinement of practical com-

ponents. Correspondingly, the core responsibility of on-campus teaching staff is to effectively translate these educational elements, precisely integrating the ideological and political values inherent in regional cultural resources and industrial practice into every aspect of course delivery, thereby ensuring that both on-campus and off-campus resources genuinely serve the goal of three-dimensional integration in the education of ideals and convictions.

Furthermore, schools should align with the reform direction of vocational education and establish a scientific and comprehensive new evaluation mechanism. Regarding evaluators, it is essential to move beyond the limitations of teacher-centered assessments by inviting corporate mentors and cultural scholars to participate, ensuring a holistic evaluation perspective. In terms of evaluation content, the focus should be on assessing students' ability to apply course knowledge, their understanding and inheritance of regional culture, as well as the cultivation of professional ethics and patriotic sentiments. For evaluation methods, comprehensive and integrated assessments should be conducted using feedback materials such as student learning process records, aiming to achieve objective and fair results that truly reflect the educational effectiveness of the three-dimensional integration.

5 Conclusion

The integration of curriculum, practice and culture in three dimensions offers a holistic approach to addressing the fragmentation of educational dimensions and the lack of effectiveness in vocational education concerning the cultivation of ideals and convictions [14]. The initiative has been successful in organically integrating these local cultural elements into curriculum design, practical activities, and cultural environments. As a result, a tangible, participatory, and inheritable local spiritual framework has been constructed within the broader context of national narratives and contemporary missions. This approach has been demonstrated to significantly enhance the appeal and impact of ideological and belief education.

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