

The role of volunteer participation: Theory and practice in teacher morality education program

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Abstract: The National Education Congress in China (2018) proposed that teacher morality should be of the top priority in teacher evaluation. However, in real life, teacher morality anomie happens frequently, which has attracted the attention of society. The quality of professional teacher morality education of normal university students is related to the future development of teachers' morality. For a long time, normal universities in China have conducted teacher morality education program based on the theoretical curriculum, which makes the curriculum of teacher morality education become a mere formality. Some normal universities pay little attention to practical education of teacher morality and lack guidance for problems concerning practice in the process of teacher morality education. The practical teacher morality education in the real sense cannot be really implemented, and normal students cannot experience the sense of responsibility and confidence of the future teacher career through the practice of teacher morality education. Moreover, practical teacher morality education is not involved in the evaluation system of student education in normal universities. The absence of practical education in teachers' morality leads to unfavorable outcome of teacher morality education. This article explores the intrinsic relationship between volunteer participation and teacher morality education in altruism, clarifies the ways in which volunteer participation plays a role in teachers morality education of normal university students, together with the way volunteer participation affects cultivating students' sense of responsibility and tempering their moral will. This article aims to find ways to improve the practical education of teachers' morality for normal university students.

Keywords: Practice, Teacher morality, Theory, Volunteer participation.

1. Introduction

The 19th People's Congress of the Communist Party of China advocated that the society should show respect to teachers, meanwhile the concerning parties should strengthen the construction of teacher morality. As future teachers, the professional morality of normal university students is related to the development of teacher morality. The practical education environment provided by volunteer participation is a favorable way to cultivate teacher morality of normal university students. The cultivation of teacher morality of normal university students in the New Era requires systematical setting of the content of volunteer participation, optimizing the organization and management of volunteer participation, and evaluating the effect of volunteer participation, to promote the competency of volunteers.

Since the 21st century, the Chinese government has paid full attention to teachers' morality in all education sectors and issued a series of corresponding professional morality codes to strengthen the construction of teachers' morality. Including the *Regulation of professional morality for teachers of secondary vocational schools (Trial)* (2000); *Regulation of professional morality for primary and secondary school teachers* (2008); *Regulation of professional morality for teachers in colleges and universities* (2011); *Ten principles of professional conduct for middle and primary school teachers in the New Era*; *Ten principles of professional conduct for teachers in the New Era* (2018). *Regulation of professional morality for teachers in primary and secondary*

school (2008) is also a remarkable milestone in the time that China emphasizes on implementing quality education and promoting the all-round development of students.

Teacher morality refer to the sum of the moral qualities, behavioral norms and values formed by teachers in specific educational practices, among which the values are stable and durable, and represent the quality requirements and morality expectations of the society for teachers (Li & Han, 2020). In a social environment with an increasingly rich material and spiritual culture, factors affecting and restricting the teacher morality of normal university students are increasing. Normal university students are generally deficient in professional morality, such as occupational cognitive bias, easily influenced professional ideal, weakening of professional morality practice, and lack of professional emotion (Wang, 2020). At present, the main dilemma of teachers' morality education among normal students is that the social employment orientation emphasizes capability more than morality, and teachers' morality education of normal students deforms into personal morality consciousness. Also, the scope of teacher morality education is generalized, and the students' morality accomplishment is narrowed to the universal morality requirement. The morality requirement of teachers is not specifically put forward. Educational practice activities are limited and virtual, and teachers' morality among normal university students are limited to rational moral cognition (Zhao & Liu, 2023).

The main objective of a normal university is to cultivate excellent educational practitioners, and the construction and adherence of teachers' morality education is the foundation of education. Therefore, under the general trend of educational reform in the New Era, it is of great significance for China to strengthen the morality education among normal students (Qiu, 2022).

1.1. Teacher Morality Education

Most countries are accustomed to adopting penetrative education in the education of teachers' morality and pay attention to the close connection between teachers' morality education and daily life. For example, the United States integrates teacher morality education into the daily moral education of students. It emphasizes and pays attention to its practicality and carries out teacher morality education subtly in the daily life of normal students, to improve the effect of teacher morality education (Darling-Hammond, 2020). In the United States, each state has its own teacher certification requirements, which include requirements for teacher morality and character. For example, in California, teachers are required to pass the morality test (CBEST) to demonstrate competence in professional morality and character. In New York State, teachers are required to pass the Teacher Professional and Ethical Responsibility Exam (TPEP) to demonstrate competence in professional morality and responsibility. Many universities and schools offer professional morality and character education and training as part of their education programs. For example, in the College of Education at the University of Illinois, students are required to take the Morality in Education course to learn the morality of the teaching profession and the practice of professional morality. In the School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, students are required to take a Teacher Morality course to learn about the values and practice of professional morality in the teaching profession. During educational practice, schools and practice instructors will also supervise and guide students' professional morality and moral character. Students are expected to follow the school's code of professional morality and standards and to be supervised and evaluated by a practice instructor.

In the United Kingdom, the Teaching Regulation Agency requires teacher education courses to include a practical education component to help students gain practical teaching experience. In practical education, students are required to practice in schools and receive guidance and supervision from tutors. The content of practical education includes the practice of curriculum design, teaching methods, student assessment, classroom management and so on. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership also requires practical education to be included in teacher education courses.

At present, most of the teachers' morality courses in normal universities in China are mainly taught in theory, and some normal students also believe that they only need to learn professional knowledge and skills during school, but the cultivation of teachers' morality remains a matter after these normal students joining the work. It is far from enough to train teachers who meet the needs of society only by listening to lectures, evaluating classes, and giving concentrated lectures. It is difficult for normal

students to realize the importance and necessity of developing teacher morality with theoretical knowledge in class, let alone generate emotional identification of the teaching profession (Li, et al., 2020). Chinese colleges and universities have long carried out the teaching style based on theoretical courses, which has seriously weakened the important position of practical teaching in the implementation of teacher morality education curriculum for normal students. To be specific, some normal universities do not pay attention to organizing normal students to participate in activities related to the practice of teacher morality and lack necessary guidance for the problems related to teacher morality in the process of normal education. The practice of teacher morality in the real sense cannot be really implemented, and it is difficult for normal students to experience the sense of responsibility and gain in the future teacher career through the practice of teacher morality education (Wang, et al., 2022).

1.2. Problems in Teacher Morality Education in China

However, there are problems in teacher morality education in China. Most of the normal universities or universities with normal specialty do not really realize the significance of teacher morality cultivation. The content of teacher morality education is not comprehensive with knowledge infusion only. Normal students therefore lack comprehensive competency in normal education. In their investigation, Sun et al. distributed questionnaires to normal university students national-wide and obtained a total of 1027 valid questionnaires. Their survey results showed that 89.68% of normal university students believe that they have applied a considerable part of the theoretical knowledge of teacher morality cultivation in their educational practices and impressed a lot from the practical education. However, in terms of morality curriculum, 85.49% of normal students think that the proportion of theoretical courses is greater than that of practical courses, and only about 8% of normal students think that the proportion of practical courses is roughly equal to or even greater than that of theoretical courses. This reflects that most universities focus on theoretical education for the cultivation of teachers' morality, and the setting of practical courses for the cultivation of teachers' morality is not reasonable enough. Moreover, the connection between theoretical courses and practical activities is not close enough. Take education internships as an example. In recent years, some colleges and universities arrange one-week education internship activities each semester according to the requirements of talent training programs, to help normal students comprehensively and deeply understand the current situation of education, teaching, and management in primary and secondary schools. In the process of education internship, normal students pay too much attention to the acquisition of actual teaching experience. The feeling that students gain is more about the learning and improvement of teaching skills and teaching content, and rarely involves the strengthening of teacher morality awareness and the improvement of teacher morality accomplishment (Wang, et al., 2022). Supervisors of practical education of normal university students should highlight the importance of morality education before students start practical internship and guide students to think over the responsibility of teachers during their educational practice.

As Zhou, et al. (2022) said, traditional teacher morality education is carried out in the way of theoretical explanation, which makes normal students regard the professional morality of teachers as an abstract concept, which cannot be truly internalized into their daily life. This way of explaining the theory is easy to make normal students have prejudice in their thoughts, so that they can't really recognize and understand the professional morality of teachers. The practical education of teacher morality for normal university students mainly focuses on campus cultural activities and off-campus practice bases, and has achieved certain results, but there are still deficiencies such as relatively simple form, weak attraction, and old-fashioned way.

Most of the existing studies are about the problems and countermeasures of teacher morality education for normal university students, and there is a lack of research on the cultivation of teacher morality from the perspective of students, and the relevant research scope needs to be further expanded and deepened (Liu, 2020). Teachers' morality is formed in practice, which has practicality. The practicability of teacher morality education is always buried. To sum up, further study in teacher morality education should focus on the practical aspect of it.

1.3. *Volunteer Participation in China*

As per the Voluntary Service Recording Measures issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in China in 2012, volunteer participation is defined as the voluntary act of dedicating one's time, energy, and physical abilities to assist others and contribute to society, without expecting any kind of compensation. Chen et al. (2022) described volunteer participation as the selfless act of individuals or organizations providing a range of services to those who are not part of their immediate family without any rewards. The interpretation of volunteer participation will fluctuate among individuals, locations, and periods due to varying political, economic, cultural, and social circumstances. Volunteer participation has become a widespread and significant topic globally as the economy and society continue to develop. According to Lu et al. (2020), it has become a crucial and influential element in the modernization of social governance systems and the capacity for governing. Overall, volunteer participation needs to include basic elements, including self-willing, non-profit, contribution.

In recent years, scholars in volunteer participation have engaged in discussions and conducted research from many perspectives, leading to significant findings. According to Lu and Zhang (2014), in the preface to the Dictionary of Chinese Volunteer Participation compiled by the Beijing Volunteer Service Development Research Institute, philanthropy ceased for 40 years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China due to various reasons. However, volunteerism persisted in the form of volunteer participation to educate people and develop society. Lu (2017) explicitly said in his book Introduction to Volunteer Participation with Chinese Characteristics that the time from the establishment of the People's Republic of China to the implementation of reform and opening-up is a significant phase in volunteer participation with distinct Chinese attributes. During this period, volunteer participation exhibited two prominent characteristics. Firstly, most of these efforts were directed towards political development and ethical instruction. Secondly, while the call for volunteer participation was associated with volunteerism, it failed to fully represent the voluntary aspect of volunteer participation due to significant interference from the government and party organizations. In Chen's (2018) analysis, it was observed that volunteer participation in China has transitioned from being driven by patriotic, administrative, and revolutionary motives since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, to being more legalized, socialized, and internationally oriented during the Reform and Opening-up period starting in 1978. The youth's volunteer participation has been a matter of particular focus since the reform and opening period. This focus has resulted in the creation of several academic outcomes (Tan, 2019).

The Report to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2012) emphasized that the major objective of education was to cultivate individuals with strong morality values. This major objective served as the guiding principle for education in China ever since. The Communist Party of China outlines the socialist core value which Chinese characteristics as prosperity, democracy, civilization, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendliness. The enhancement of morality and political education has been implemented to cultivate these values and to imbue a heightened consciousness of them. Volunteer participation influences the moral values of university students and cultivates their sense of social duty (Zhang, 2019; Li, 2021; Rong, 2022; Zhang, 2023). Hence, volunteer participation has been strongly advocated to cultivate student morality value ever since then.

The new generation of youth volunteers advocates the new concept of volunteer participation as love and devotion, to help yourself through helping others. This service concept of volunteer participation promotes that volunteer participation is not just a one-way devotion, it provides youth with opportunities to develop personal skills and enhance horizons (China Youth Research Center, 1997). To be specific, volunteer participation also benefits university students by strengthening the humanities and cultivating their capacity for solving problems cooperatively (Geng, et al., 2022). Young people cultivate moral sentiment in volunteer participation and stimulate innovation and creation by exercising ability and skills (Tan, 2019). The importance of volunteer participation for the development of university students lies in their ability to express their compassion and benevolence and contribute to the well-being of others and the advancement of society. Simultaneously, volunteer participation offers an opportunity for students to enhance their personal growth and character development (Jin & Zhu,

2019; Tan, 2020). Volunteer participation is an activity that requires interaction between volunteers and their clients. It is a work of dedication. Through volunteer participation, volunteers can also feel love and respect from their clients. Nevertheless, volunteer participation needs a combination of planning, organizing, coordination, and operation from a volunteer team or organization. And students may confront various types of difficulties that they should work together with their teammates to overcome it. This experience nurtures their ability to cooperate with problem-solving (Jin & Zhu, 2019; Geng, et al., 2022).

1.4. Relationship Between Volunteer Participation and Teacher Morality Education

One of the significant features of volunteer participation is that it contributes to the welfare of the public self-willingly (Lu et al., 2020). The fundamental focus of teacher morality education lies in cultivating a deep sense of love and care for students, a genuine passion for the educational mission, and embracing the morality principle of selflessness as a guiding force throughout the teaching process (Li et al., 2020). The principles of love and selflessness in Chinese teacher morality education are primarily demonstrated through two key components. The first principle is educational equity, which entails teachers treating all students impartially and adhering to consistent standards and norms. It is important to provide students with diverse features and personalities with a high level of care and tolerance, as well as fairness and justice (Chen, 2020). Furthermore, school education facilitates the advancement of social development. Teachers cultivate students who will propel the future advancement of the nation and empower them to assume various roles and make contributions to the progress of society (Zhou et al., 2022). Thus, when considering altruism and love, there exists a significant correlation between volunteer participation and teacher morality education.

As Qiu (2018) said, the primary objective of teacher morality education is to assist normal students in improving the level of teacher morality and professional competency. This is crucial to effectively fulfil the responsibility of instilling moral values and nurturing individuals, enabling students to develop into outstanding members of society. Ultimately, this will contribute to social progress and the promotion of positive values. The principles of dedication, friendship, mutual assistance, and progress, which are inherent in volunteer participation, align closely with the fundamental principles of teachers' morality standards. This alignment highlights the significant and indispensable role that volunteer participation plays in the practical application and development of morality values among normal university students (Bai, 2021).

The practice of cultivating teacher morality differs from the nature of teacher morality education, as it focuses on the independent nurturing of normal students. By fostering the growth of teacher morality behavior in their professional activity, it is possible to effectively enforce the morality standards that teachers should adhere to. This, in turn, establishes a strong basis for their future career advancement. Simultaneously, fostering the morality integrity of normal university students can be heightened, so facilitating their comprehensive growth and enabling them to acclimatize to the educational endeavor more effectively, ultimately advancing the enhancement of educational standards. When cultivating teachers' morality, it is also important to focus on practical education. This allows normal students to apply the principles of teachers' morality in real-life situations and genuinely internalize them, leading to positive outcomes (Zhou et al., 2022).

Off-campus practice enables normal university students to engage in volunteer participation during weekends or free time. They can interact with the local community and perform volunteer participation such as teaching, assisting, and providing companionship to left-behind youngsters and the elderly. During the winter and summer vacation, university students will be sent to remote poverty-stricken areas with backward education, so that normal university students can accumulate teaching experience, exercise teaching skills, cultivate educational feelings, and promote the cultivation of teacher ethics while helping others (Zhou et al., 2022).

1.5. Suggestion to Improve Teacher Morality Education in China

In the context of high-quality growth of normal universities, Li (2021) emphasized the importance of curriculum ideology and politics reform in cultivating normal students who possess a strong sense of

social duty and morality. Volunteer participation serves as a crucial method for instilling morality values in normal university students. The theoretical instruction on teacher morality is disconnected from the practical application of teacher morality and lacks coherence as a unified entity. By engaging in volunteer participation, normal university students have direct understanding of the duties of teachers and witness the practical impact of teachers' morality principles (Fan & Zhao, 2022). The existing methods of morality education for normal university students lack effectiveness. It is imperative to incorporate morality education into social service activities and motivate normal students to engage in practical activities such as educational volunteer participation, study investigations, and other type of volunteer participation (Sun, 2023). Engaging in volunteer participation is an excellent opportunity for normal students to gain firsthand knowledge and experience of exemplary teacher morality in action. Normal universities could promote morality education and enhance students' professional identity and social responsibility by engaging them in educational volunteer participation and other forms of volunteer participation.

Normal universities place greater emphasis on cultivating students' morality value (Zhao, 2019). The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2022 has made a strategic plan to enhance the development of teacher morality values, improve the quality of educational team, and foster a culture of respect for teachers and education in society. According to Xi (2014), a competent teacher must possess morality qualifications, and a skilled teacher must serve as a role model in teaching and personal conduct. Teacher morality plays a crucial role in shaping the overall character of typical university students. Hence, enhancing the efficacy of morality education has emerged as a shared issue among teachers and educators. Studies indicate that the approach used in morality education significantly impacts its effectiveness. When enhancing morality education, educators should begin by focusing on the methods of morality education and employing a comprehensive approach that includes persuasion education, example demonstration, emotional cultivation, practice, and self-education. These methods should be based on morality principles such as the unity of knowledge and practice, the combination of collective education and individual education, and positive education and discipline restraint (Lu, Wang, 2010). Yorio & Ye (2012) combined volunteer participation with university classroom teaching to achieve better teacher morality education results. They also emphasized that volunteer participation has a positive effect on students' personalized development and the cultivation of social responsibility. Specifically, individuals should focus on the crucial significance of morality experiential situations in morality education. Integrating professional education, social education, and family education, while utilizing diverse community resources, to optimize the impact of morality education (Zhang, 2023).

Volunteer participation is a common method of integrating classroom education with social education, utilizing community resources to its fullest extent. Currently, the growth of volunteer participation has evolved into an expansion of university morality education, and volunteer participation is assuming a more significant position in university morality education. Maximizing the educational role of volunteer participation in morality education has emerged as a significant focus of ideological and political education for university students (Zheng, 2013). The practical exposure of university students to new experiences facilitates the acquisition of fresh knowledge, the development of new skills, and the enhancement of practical abilities, enabling them to stay abreast of the current trends (Zhou et al., 2022). Therefore, normal universities can adopt educational volunteer participation as a way for the practice of morality education for students.

2. Conclusion

Normal universities should systematically and completely set up two major modules of the theory and practice of teacher morality education for students. Teacher morality practice courses include all kinds of education activities and practical experience of teachers' morality. These courses should emphasize the combination of theory and practice to help normal students better understand the professional ideals and morality of teachers and get exercise in practice. Volunteer participation, especially educational volunteer participation, is a practical method of normal teacher morality education. Normal universities can encourage normal students to step out of the classroom and go to the

community to carry out various forms of volunteer participation, enhance their engagement in social practice and enhance their sense of social responsibility in winter and summer vacations or other spare time. In this way, they can practice as a teacher and feel the responsibility of teacher, experience the feeling of devoting to education career without asking for reward but focusing on the morality improvement.

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