

Application Research of Inquiry-Based Teaching Method in Ideological and Moral and Legal Education in Colleges and Universities

Aiwa Huang*

School of Marxism, Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, Hainan, 571126, China

**Corresponding author*

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Abstract: This study focuses on the innovative application of the inquiry-based teaching method in the "Ideological and Moral and Legal Education" curriculum in colleges and universities. Through systematic analysis of its inherent compatibility with Marxist epistemology of practice and constructivism theory, it demonstrates the unique advantages of this method in promoting students' realization of the transformation of "knowing, believing, and acting." The study constructs an implementation path with problem situation design, teaching process organization, and typical case development as the core, and deeply explores solutions to key issues such as teacher role transformation, construction of a diversified evaluation mechanism, and integration of teaching resources. The results show that the inquiry-based teaching method can effectively improve the teaching effectiveness and educational function of ideological and political courses by stimulating students' subjectivity and cultivating critical thinking, providing theoretical support and a practical paradigm for the teaching reform of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities in the new era.

1. Introduction

Ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities are key courses for implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, and undertake the important mission of cultivating people for the country. Entering a new era, the state has put forward higher requirements for the construction of ideological and political courses in colleges and universities[1]. A series of important policy documents, such as "Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools in the New Era" and "Implementation Plan for Reforming and Innovating Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools in the New Era," all clearly point out the need to deepen teaching reform, innovate teaching methods, and focus on improving the ideological, theoretical, affinity, and pertinence of ideological and political courses. In this context, the traditional "indoctrination" and "preaching" teaching models are difficult to fully adapt to the development of the times and student needs.

Exploring and applying teaching methods that can stimulate students' subjectivity and promote the unity of knowledge and practice has become an inevitable choice for improving the teaching quality of ideological and political courses[2]. Inquiry-based teaching, as a modern teaching method that is student-centered, problem-oriented, and emphasizes the thinking process and practical experience, its core concept is highly consistent with the inherent goal of ideological and political courses to achieve the unity of "knowledge, belief, and action." Conducting systematic research on it has important theoretical value and practical significance.

Currently, the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis" course in colleges and universities still faces several prominent challenges in teaching practice. On the one hand, some classrooms have not effectively broken away from the drawbacks of emphasizing theoretical teaching while neglecting value guidance and ability cultivation[3]. The teaching methods are relatively simple, leading to students' lack of deep-seated recognition and inner resonance with the course content, and their sense of gain is not strong. On the other hand, even if practical teaching is carried out, there is a tendency towards formalism and superficiality. The essential attribute of practical teaching as an extension and deepening of theory has not been deeply grasped, so that theory and practice present a "two skins" state, making it difficult to achieve a substantial improvement in students' ideological and moral qualities and legal literacy[4]. The existence of these problems highlights the urgency of teaching method innovation and also points out the problem orientation of this research: that is, how to organically integrate inquiry-based teaching into the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis" course through scientific teaching design, so as to effectively solve the above-mentioned dilemmas.

Inquiry-based teaching is not a completely new concept. It has been widely used in natural science and engineering education with significant results. In recent years, the domestic education community has also begun to pay attention to its application potential in the humanities and social sciences, especially in ideological and political education[5]. Existing research generally affirms the positive role of inquiry-based teaching in stimulating learning interest and cultivating critical thinking. However, in-depth research specifically targeting the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis" course, systematically discussing the application logic, implementation path, and the internal mechanism of its impact on students' values formation is still insufficient. Most studies either remain at the advocacy of macro concepts or are limited to a simple list of specific teaching techniques, lacking a systematic analysis framework that starts from the characteristics of the course and connects theory, design, implementation, and evaluation[6]. In view of this, this study aims to deeply analyze the theoretical foundation of inquiry-based teaching, closely integrate the teaching objectives and content characteristics of the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis" course, and construct a set of effective application models.

2. Intrinsic Connection

2.1 Theoretical Origins

The application of inquiry-based teaching methods in the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis" course in universities has a profound theoretical foundation. Its theoretical origin can be traced back to Dewey's pragmatic educational thought, which emphasizes the educational concept of "learning by doing" and advocates that learning should originate from problems in real-world situations. Piaget's constructivist theory further supports it, arguing that knowledge is the process of cognitive subjects actively constructing it in interaction with the environment. Bruner's discovery learning theory strengthens cognitive autonomy in the inquiry process, emphasizing that students should discover the internal structure of knowledge through exploration. These educational theories resonate deeply with the Marxist epistemology of practice at the epistemological level, and

together constitute the theoretical basis of inquiry-based teaching methods.

2.2 Unified Objectives

Inquiry-based teaching methods and the teaching objectives of ideological and political courses have an inherent unity. The fundamental goal of the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis" course is to guide students to achieve the transformation from knowledge cognition to value identity and then to conscious practice. The inquiry-based teaching method can effectively promote this transformation through a problem-oriented learning process. At the cognitive level, it promotes students to deepen from "knowing what" to "knowing why"; at the level of value identity, it promotes rational choice by directly facing value conflicts; at the practical level, it transforms the inquiry process into simulated practice, cultivating students' moral judgment and legal application capabilities. This process always reflects the dialectical unity of "teacher-led" and "student-centered," with teachers as the designers and guides of inquiry and students as active constructors of meaning.

2.3 Comparative Analysis with Project-Based Learning

In comparison to project-based learning, inquiry-based learning demonstrates unique value in ideological and political education (IPE) courses. Project-based learning is "output"-oriented, focusing on the completion of specific products or solutions; inquiry-based learning, on the other hand, is "problem"-centered, emphasizing the thought process and cognitive construction. In the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis" course, the two approaches are complementary: project-based learning is suitable for comprehensive practices requiring tangible outcomes, while inquiry-based learning is more suitable for in-depth analysis of core concepts and value conflicts. For example, when discussing theoretical difficulties such as "equity and efficiency," inquiry-based learning, through progressively designed questions, is better able to touch the depths of thought and promote the internalization of theory[7].

The implementation of inquiry-based learning needs to grasp the particularity of IPE courses. Compared to specialized courses, inquiry activities in IPE courses have a stronger value orientation. When designing inquiry questions, teachers should not only maintain openness to stimulate student thinking but also ensure that the inquiry process always follows the correct value direction. The design of inquiry topics should be closely integrated with the core content of the textbook, focusing on the core issues of modules such as outlook on life, values, morality, and the rule of law, so that students can naturally achieve course objectives in the inquiry process. At the same time, the inquiry process should focus on the combination of theory and practice, guiding students to use the learned theories to analyze real-world problems, and to test and deepen theoretical understanding in practice.

At the teaching method level, inquiry-based teaching emphasizes creating authentic problem situations. These problem situations should originate from students' real lives and social hotspots, be ideological and controversial, and be able to trigger students' cognitive conflicts and value thinking. Through various forms such as group discussions, case studies, and role-playing, students are guided through a complete inquiry process: from discovering problems and proposing hypotheses to collecting evidence, analyzing and demonstrating, and finally forming their own judgments and reflecting. This process not only trains students' critical thinking but also promotes the comprehensive improvement of their value judgment ability and rule of law literacy.

3. Implementation Path

Effective implementation of inquiry-based teaching methods in the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis" course requires the construction of a systematic teaching path. The construction of this path should be based on the characteristics of the curriculum and students' cognitive patterns. It should achieve the organic unity of knowledge transfer and value guidance through carefully designed problem scenarios, scientifically organized teaching processes, and in-depth development of typical teaching cases.

3.1 Problem Scenario Design

The design of problem scenarios is the primary component of implementing inquiry-based teaching. High-quality problem scenarios should possess three basic characteristics: ideological depth, realism, and openness. Ideological depth requires that the problem design closely aligns with the core content of the textbook, focusing on key concepts such as the Marxist outlook on life, values, morality, and the rule of law. Realism emphasizes that the problem should be close to students' life experiences and the background of the times, selecting social hot topics, moral dilemmas, or typical legal cases as vehicles[8]. Openness requires that the problem can trigger discussions from multiple perspectives, avoiding simple either/or judgments. For example, when teaching the "Moral Values" section, one could design a "Moral Boundaries in the Digital Age" inquiry theme, guiding students to explore realistic moral issues such as cyber violence and information privacy. In the "Rule of Law" section, one could select controversial judicial cases to analyze the inherent tension between law and morality, and between reason and legal principles.

3.2 Teaching Organization and Process Design

The organization and implementation of the teaching process need to follow the basic laws of inquiry-based learning, constructing a closed-loop process of "problem guidance - independent inquiry - collaborative construction - reflection and deepening." In the problem guidance stage, teachers create scenarios to stimulate cognitive conflict and raise challenging core questions. The independent inquiry stage requires students to independently collect data, analyze problems, and form preliminary views. This stage requires teachers to provide necessary resource support and guidance on research methods. The collaborative construction stage promotes the exchange and collision of different viewpoints through group discussions, debates, role-playing, and other forms. Finally, in the reflection and deepening stage, teachers guide students to summarize the inquiry process, elevate perceptual knowledge to rational cognition, and realize the sublimation and internalization of theory. Throughout the entire process, teachers need to accurately grasp the "degree" of guidance, avoiding both excessive intervention that restricts students' thinking and laissez-faire that causes inquiry to deviate from the direction.

3.3 Examples of Typical Case Design

In designing typical cases, differentiated strategies should be adopted based on the characteristics of different teaching modules. In the ideological perspective on life teaching section, a project like "Interpretation of the Spiritual World of Role Models of the Times" can be designed to guide students to explore the path to realizing life values through in-depth research into the growth trajectory of advanced figures. Value teaching is suitable for using scenario simulations of "Value Ranking and Selection," allowing students to make value judgments and explain the reasons in simulated social situations. The morality section can be combined with "Micro-Public Welfare

Practice and Reflection," requiring students to analyze the psychological mechanisms and social effects of moral behavior based on participation in public welfare services. The rule of law perspective teaching can take the form of "Legal Analysis of Hot Cases" to train students' ability to analyze real-world problems using legal thinking. These case designs should maintain relative independence and focus on the logical connection between each other, together forming a complete teaching system.

During the implementation process, special attention needs to be paid to the evaluation mechanism of inquiry activities. Different from traditional teaching evaluation, the evaluation of inquiry-based teaching should focus on process, development, and diversity. Process evaluation focuses on students' thinking ability, cooperative spirit, and inquiry attitude demonstrated in inquiry activities; developmental evaluation focuses on examining students' progress and growth in the inquiry process; diverse evaluation requires the comprehensive use of multiple methods such as teacher evaluation, student self-evaluation, and group mutual evaluation. The evaluation criteria should be highly consistent with the curriculum objectives, not only examining students' mastery of theoretical knowledge but also focusing on the formation process of their values and the development level of their thinking ability.

The integration and utilization of teaching resources are an important support for ensuring the effectiveness of inquiry-based teaching. In addition to textbooks and traditional literature, modern information technology should be fully utilized to build a digital inquiry platform and integrate resources such as video cases, databases, and online discussion areas. At the same time, we must actively develop off-campus resources and establish cooperative relationships with courts, procuratorates, communities, and other units to provide students with real social practice scenarios. The effective use of these resources can significantly enhance the sense of reality and immersion of inquiry activities and improve students' learning engagement.

4. Issues and Countermeasures in the Implementation of Inquiry-Based Teaching

The effective implementation of inquiry-based teaching in the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and the Rule of Law" curriculum faces challenges from various aspects, including teacher competence, student participation, and teaching management. Systematically analyzing these issues and proposing targeted solutions is an important guarantee for ensuring the smooth progress of teaching reform.

4.1 Teacher Role Transformation and Competence Improvement

Teacher role transformation is the primary challenge in implementing inquiry-based teaching. In the traditional teaching model, teachers mainly play the role of knowledge transmitters, while in inquiry-based teaching, teachers need to transform into guides, organizers, and facilitators of the learning process. This role change places higher demands on teachers: they must not only possess a solid theoretical foundation but also master modern teaching methods; they must not only be good at designing inquiry questions but also be able to effectively organize classroom discussions. Some teachers may have difficulties in concept transformation and single teaching methods when implementing inquiry-based teaching due to long-term habits of lecturing. To this end, it is necessary to establish a systematic teacher development mechanism, through special training, teaching observation, case studies, and other forms, to help teachers master the core essentials of inquiry-based teaching. At the same time, teachers should be encouraged to carry out teaching research, constantly reflect on and improve teaching methods in practice, and form a teaching style with personal characteristics.

4.2 Activation and Regulation of Student Subjectivity

The activation and regulation of student subjectivity is another key issue. Inquiry-based teaching emphasizes student-centeredness, but this does not mean letting things drift. In actual operation, some problems may occur, such as some students not participating actively, "free-riding" phenomenon, or discussions deviating from the theme and becoming superficial. Solving these problems requires starting from both system design and process management. In terms of system design, clear learning task books and evaluation criteria should be established so that students have rules to follow in the inquiry process. In terms of process management, teachers need to understand learning progress and intervene appropriately through regular inspections, individual guidance, and group feedback. Special attention should be paid to the fact that in discussions involving value judgments and moral choices, teachers should grasp the scale of guidance, respect students' independent thinking, and ensure that discussions do not deviate from the correct direction of socialist core values.

4.3 Teaching Resources and Institutional Support

The integration and optimized allocation of teaching resources are the material guarantee for the implementation of inquiry-based teaching. Compared to traditional lecture-based teaching, inquiry-based teaching places higher demands on teaching resources. In terms of time resources, it is necessary to reasonably allocate time for pre-class preparation, classroom discussion, and post-class extension. In terms of spatial resources, it is necessary to create a teaching environment conducive to group discussion and interactive communication. In terms of information resources, it is necessary to provide a rich and diverse range of learning materials and research tools. To address these issues, schools should increase investment, build specialized activity classrooms and discussion spaces, develop digital teaching platforms, and establish teaching case libraries and resource repositories. At the same time, teachers should also be good at utilizing existing resources, and maximize the effectiveness of resources through careful design and organization.

4.4 Reform of the Evaluation System

The reform of the evaluation system is a key link in promoting the in-depth development of inquiry-based teaching. The traditional evaluation method, which focuses on knowledge examination, is difficult to fully reflect students' gains and growth in inquiry-based learning. Establishing a diversified evaluation system adapted to inquiry-based teaching requires three transformations: shifting from focusing on outcome evaluation to emphasizing both process and outcome, shifting from a single knowledge examination to a comprehensive evaluation of abilities and qualities, and shifting from teacher-led evaluation to multi-subject participation in evaluation. Specifically, portfolio assessment can be adopted to record students' performance and progress in the inquiry process; performance assessment can be used to examine students' ability performance in practical tasks; and student self-evaluation and peer evaluation mechanisms can be introduced to promote students' self-reflection and mutual learning. The evaluation content should cover multiple dimensions such as knowledge mastery, ability development, and attitude formation, and comprehensively reflect students' growth trajectory.

5. Conclusion

This study systematically explored the application value and practical paths of inquiry-based teaching methods in the "Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis" course in universities.

The research indicates that inquiry-based teaching, with its core characteristics of problem-orientation, autonomous construction, and practical testing, highly aligns with the intrinsic teaching goals of ideological and political courses to achieve the unity of "knowing, believing, and acting." By constructing a complete implementation system including problem situation design, teaching process organization, and typical case development, inquiry-based teaching can effectively stimulate student subjectivity, promote the transformation of theoretical cognition to value identity, and cultivate students' critical thinking and value judgment abilities. The study also reveals that the successful implementation of inquiry-based teaching needs to overcome multiple challenges such as the transformation of teachers' roles, the guidance of student participation, and the allocation of teaching resources. Teachers need to transform from knowledge transmitters to learning guides, establish a diversified evaluation mechanism that emphasizes both process and development, and construct a teaching model that integrates "inquiry-practice-reflection." These measures collectively ensure that inquiry-based teaching can fully exert its educational effects while adhering to the correct value orientation.

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