

The Value, Dilemma and Optimization Path of Labor Education in Colleges and Universities in the New Era

Danni Li^{1,2,a,*}, Zhili Liu^{1,b}

¹School of Marxism, Dalian University of Technology, Dalian, China

²School of Architecture and Art, Dalian University of Technology, Dalian, China

^alidanni@dut.edu.cn, ^bliuzhili@dut.edu.cn

*Corresponding author

Abstract: As China enters a new era, the labor education has achieved remarkable results through the collaborative innovation efforts of all parties, which is conducive to promoting college students to practice the unity of knowledge and action, inherit excellent traditional culture, improve comprehensive quality, and promote all-round development. However, there are still difficulties such as the one-sided understanding of labor education hindering its own development, the formalization of labor education affecting its implementation, the insufficient sense of experience of labor education hindering the in-depth participation of college students, and the lack of "pertinence" of labor education evaluation affecting its effective function. To promote labor education for college students in the new era, we should clarify the training goals of labor talents, build an all-round education pattern, build a strong team and big data evaluation, improve the support and guarantee mechanism, coordinate the development of educational resources, scientifically design labor courses, deepen the sense of participation experience, expand the form of labor education, strengthen public opinion publicity and guidance, and condense labor education culture.

Keywords: Labor education in Colleges and Universities in the New Era, Intrinsic Value of Labor Education, Labor Education Curriculum

1. Introduction

In recent years, the inclusion of labor-related content within the field of education has become a prominent area of public concern, leading to a renewed focus on the role of labor education. Through labor education, young students can not only acquire knowledge about nature and the world but also gain an understanding of the hardships faced by the people and the significant role of labor in the societal development process. This fosters a deeper comprehension of the historical evolution of society among a wide spectrum of young learners, ultimately culminating in the formation of a correct labor values system tailored to the demands of the new era.

Therefore, the construction of a comprehensive labor education and development system has become both urgent and formidable. Building upon relevant research findings and rooted in practical contemplation, the author undertakes an extensive review and examination of the value of character development through labor education in Chinese higher education, the challenges faced, and the implementation pathways in recent years. This endeavor aims to stimulate and contribute to the ongoing research and advancement of labor education in Chinese higher education in the new era.

2. The Essence of Labor Education in Colleges and Universities

Labor education is an educational endeavor aimed at promoting the development of labor values and cultivating strong work ethics among students. In the new era, the nature of labor has undergone significant changes, leading to a fresh perspective on labor education in higher education. Liu Xiangbing's work, "An Outline of Labor Education in New Era Higher Education," provides a detailed analysis of the essence of labor education in contemporary higher education. He contends that in the new era, labor education in higher education plays a crucial role as an integral component of the higher education talent cultivation system^[1]. It involves systematically imparting labor ideology, nurturing labor

skills, and providing practical labor experiences to university students in response to the evolving trends in labor development. The overarching objective is to guide contemporary university students to seek happiness and gain innovative inspiration through their labor contributions, while concurrently cultivating their sense of social responsibility, innovative spirit, and practical capabilities as advanced specialized professionals.

Combining the perspectives of the scholars mentioned above, this paper posits that the essence of labor education embodies the characteristics of the times. It is rooted in a comprehensive educational philosophy that emphasizes character building, intellectual development, physical fitness, and aesthetic appreciation. Labor education adheres to principles of purposefulness, educational value, specificity, practicality, and effectiveness. It employs diverse instructional formats, including classroom teaching and practical training, to convey labor education content that is aligned with the contemporary zeitgeist and characterized by productivity, relevance to daily life, and a service-oriented approach.

The primary aim is to impart to university students a deep understanding of the profound principles that underscore the honor, nobility, greatness, and beauty of labor. This endeavor involves equipping students with fundamental labor knowledge, essential labor competencies, indispensable labor qualities, and fostering the development of a sound labor values system. Furthermore, it encourages students to consciously practice the core socialist values. In higher education, labor education must adapt to the prevailing circumstances, grasp emerging trends, and firmly uphold the intrinsic characteristics of its essence. This ensures that labor education meets the inner needs of university students, stimulates their inherent motivation for labor, and equips them with essential labor skills for the demands of the new era.

3. The Contemporary Significance of Labor Education in Colleges and Universities

Firstly, labor education in the new era is an important means to promote the comprehensive development of university students. Labor education can urge students to pay further attention to labor. The labor process serves as a link between "knowledge" and "action," allowing students to progress from rational understanding ("knowledge") to practical leaps ("action"). Through practical experience ("action"), students reinforce their understanding ("knowledge"). The traditional concept of unity of knowledge and action in Chinese culture refers to the integration of moral cognition and moral practice. Labor helps cultivate students' correct labor values, fostering their love for labor and ability to work. Strengthening labor education is conducive to encouraging students to invest a significant amount of labor in classroom learning, experimental practices, and other activities, enhancing the quality of education and enabling individuals to develop into outstanding individuals. It also helps students cultivate a positive attitude towards employment, balance national and personal needs, match personal learning with job requirements, and form an autonomous and diverse perspective on positive employment, enhancing entrepreneurial and innovative awareness and capabilities. Furthermore, it strengthens the sense of labor responsibility, mission, and honor in the new era for students, fostering characteristics of diligent and creative labor. This encourages students to integrate their daily work with their ideal careers, dare to shoulder responsibilities, persist in striving, willingly contribute, and gain a sense of dignity, nobility, and happiness from labor^[2].

Secondly, labor education in the new era acts as an internal driving force to propel the vigorous development of national productivity. Over the past forty years of reform and opening up, China has made tremendous leaps in economic and social development, attributed to comprehensive contributions such as reform dividends, demographic dividends, and a favorable international trade and investment environment. At present, China faces challenges in development, including the gradual disappearance of the demographic dividend, strengthening constraints from resources and the environment, a slowdown in investment and exports, and a continuous weakening of traditional development drivers. The transformation of development patterns, optimization of industrial structure, and shift in growth dynamics are the only way to break through bottlenecks and transcend the "middle-income trap." A large army of laborers who love, can, and know how to work is essential. Strengthening labor education in the new era is conducive to cultivating a high-quality workforce of industrial workers and a large number of skilled workers for the nation, providing strong human support for China's transformation from speed to quality, from "Made in China" to "Created in China," and from "Intelligent Manufacturing in China" to "Intelligent Creation in China." This education not only guides contemporary university students to strive to learn scientific and cultural knowledge and develop solid skills but also educates them to uphold their ideals and beliefs, forge noble character, cultivate a sense of labor, and consciously integrate their life ideals and family happiness into the great cause of national prosperity and rejuvenation. It aims to construct a community of shared destiny where individuals and collectives, personal dreams and the

Chinese dream, and individual households and the nation merge and coexist, ultimately driving young students to realize the Chinese dream and their personal dreams in the course of continuous endeavor.

4. The Dilemma of Labor Education in Colleges and Universities

Firstly, the "one-sided" understanding of labor education hinders its own development. In the early stages of reform and opening up, there was a widespread phenomenon of "inverting the importance of mental and physical labor." Industries that primarily relied on physical labor, such as Cao Dewang's glass industry and Tao Bihua's Lao Gan Ma chili sauce industry, were highly regarded in people's eyes. However, with the emergence of "smart industries" guided by cutting-edge technologies like big data, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things, labor-intensive industries of the past lost much of their appeal compared to knowledge-intensive industries represented by intellectual labor. Currently, it is widely acknowledged that simple, repetitive labor is gradually being replaced by technology. Due to the narrow understanding of labor education in the new era, there is a constant stream of questioning regarding its resurgence and relevance in the face of changing times. However, the scope of labor education is broad, encompassing multiple dimensions of content ranging from fine intellectual labor to complex composite labor for college students. Ambiguities or narrow interpretations of labor education hinder the development planning and curriculum design in higher education. On one hand, some universities are still constrained by outdated ideas and methods, which impede the top-level design of labor education. On the other hand, due to a lack of scientific and forward-looking understanding, universities struggle to accurately grasp the characteristics and contemporary demands of labor education. This leads to the unclear definition of labor talent cultivation goals, which in turn affects the advancement and implementation of labor education in higher education.

Secondly, the "formalization" of labor education affects its implementation. The current implementation of labor education in higher education often falls into formalism. Only a few universities prioritize the effective implementation of labor education, create relevant courses, and develop implementation methods and plans. However, some universities lack the dedication of time and effort for labor education and exhibit perfunctory attitudes during its execution. This has led to insufficient integration of labor education into classroom teaching. Regarding classroom teaching implementation, these universities marginalize the practical aspects of labor education courses, including teaching arrangements, choice of teaching materials, teaching design, and specialized teacher training. Additionally, there are other issues related to the insufficient implementation of various forms of labor education, such as limited frequency and availability of practical education methods. In summary, the varying degrees of attention, investment, and depth of exploration given to labor education in different universities contribute to the problem of "formalism" in its implementation.

Thirdly, the lack of a "sense of experience" in labor education hinders deep student involvement. Due to the lack of emphasis on labor education in higher education and the formalistic approach to its implementation, labor education tends to have a monotonous form, limited content, and lacks richness and completeness. This, in turn, results in a lack of active participation and a poor sense of experience among college students. The lack of enthusiasm and experiential engagement of college students in labor education is closely related to the disconnect between educational content and students' lives and intrinsic needs, as well as the unappealing nature of the educational format. In various forms, labor education directly affects students' sense of experience, including emotional experience, interactive experience, sensory experience, and life experience. In the emotional experience aspect, universities often overlook the full utilization of labor education elements and resources, and fail to create vivid labor education scenarios, making it difficult to stimulate students' subjective awareness and enjoyment. In terms of interactive experience, the interaction between universities and students is often not well-aligned, lacking natural interaction, dialogue, and communication, resulting in a sense of isolation and independence. Regarding sensory experience, it is challenging for students to acquire labor knowledge, improve labor ethics, develop good habits and skills, and gain practical abilities through labor education. To achieve a comprehensive approach that engages students intellectually, emotionally, and physically, universities need to better harness students' senses, but this sensory experience is currently insufficiently addressed in the educational process. In terms of life experience, the content of labor education in universities often lacks integration with everyday life, and elements of "life-related" experiences are inadequately incorporated into the education. Additionally, limitations in the available facilities make it challenging for students to experience the life-oriented aspects of labor education.

Fourthly, the lack of "targeted" evaluation in labor education undermines its effective function. When observing the design and implementation of labor education evaluation and assessment in universities, it

becomes evident that the primary problem lies in the lack of "targeted" assessment methods. Some universities predominantly rely on pre-existing, mature evaluation and assessment systems within specialized disciplines when assessing labor education. This approach includes pre-set evaluation propositions, established evaluation criteria, the formulation of evaluation content, and feedback of evaluation results. Consequently, labor education evaluation exhibits issues such as "monotonous patterns," "outdated theories," and "single indicators," resulting in a lack of functional effectiveness in the evaluation and assessment of labor education. Presently, some universities lack innovation and transformation in outdated and conservative labor education evaluation principles and principles, crude and monotonous labor education evaluation forms and methods, as well as low-quality and simplistic labor evaluation content and standards. This hinders the evaluation's ability to better fulfill its function. Given the issues in labor education evaluation, universities urgently need to consider how to overcome the inherent flaws in the "Procrustean bed" and establish a more effective and targeted labor education evaluation system. Looking at the current application of new technologies like big data, traditional labor education evaluation has entered a crisis period. More efficient and personalized evaluation mechanisms and systems for contemporary labor education are emerging, and these changes are not far off.

5. The Optimization Path of Labor Education in Colleges and Universities

Firstly, it is essential to establish clear goals for labor talent development and construct a comprehensive education framework. In the rapidly evolving industries of the new era, there is a growing demand for talents who possess creativity and proficiency in new technologies. To adapt to the shift from "physically intensive" to "smart technology-intensive" times and changing labor market demands, universities must guide students to transition their thoughts and actions accordingly. This will ensure that Chinese higher education in labor education keeps pace with the Fourth Industrial Revolution and industrial transformation, promoting development and innovation. Grasping the educational framework of labor education is a key component in achieving the comprehensive education goals of the new era. Universities must prioritize the importance of labor education in their thinking, particularly by correcting students' biases toward labor education. Labor education should be integrated into ideological and political education, with ideological and political courses as the main platform, facilitating the infiltration of labor education into ideological and political courses. It is important to establish a collaborative effort involving the government, universities, society, and families to create a common labor education assessment and evaluation system. Therefore, in the new era, labor education for university students should be led by the government, carried out by universities, involve widespread social participation, receive active support from families, and promote the integration of knowledge and practice in students. This will establish a more systematic and comprehensive assessment mechanism for labor education, emphasizing its timeliness and overcoming existing constraints related to grades, rankings, and disciplines.

Secondly, it is crucial to strengthen the workforce and implement big data evaluation while improving support mechanisms. The most critical aspect of implementing and conducting labor education in schools is establishing a scientifically effective assessment and evaluation system, which will ensure that the achievements of labor education in the new era take root and grow. Achieving the balanced development of students' morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor capabilities in the new era requires breaking away from the existing value evaluation system for labor education. Instead, we should establish and enhance the training system, attendance management system, assessment and evaluation system, and supervision system for labor education. Simultaneously, efforts should be made to implement related systems such as scholarship recognition and faculty development, ensuring that labor education operates smoothly within the entire university education system. To achieve this, clear goal evaluation and assessment systems, a comprehensive labor competency assessment system, and intelligent labor education status evaluation indicators need to be established. Additionally, it is necessary to consider measures related to the establishment of an intelligent evaluation platform for labor education, focusing on three categories of projects: labor education support, in-class labor education, and non-classroom labor education.

Thirdly, there is a need for collaborative development of educational resources and the scientific design of labor courses. It is essential for universities to establish dedicated labor courses and incorporate the essence of labor education into non-labor courses, aiming to comprehensively realize the educational value of labor education. Concepts like the spirit of labor models and craftsmanship should be transmitted to students through ideological and political courses. The spirit of labor should be widely promoted among students, as the most practical and reliable way to realize individual value is through creating value in life and for society. Based on the labor education framework proposed by researcher Liu Xuebing,

including the composition and outcomes of labor values, a new-era curriculum system for labor education for university students can be designed. Encouraging students to actively participate in social practice activities, internships, practical training, and seminars, aligned with their academic and professional strengths, is essential. Through activities like student support for teaching, community volunteer service, and part-time work for learning, students can develop problem-solving skills, accumulate professional experience, enhance their employability and entrepreneurial abilities, and cultivate a deep sense of national commitment in the new era. They should consciously shape the objectives and content framework of labor courses for new-era university students.

Fourthly, it is necessary to deepen the sense of participation and expand the forms of labor education. Labor education should not be limited to theoretical teaching in the classroom but should prioritize practical experience outside the classroom. Labor education should encompass various forms of labor education with a focus on professional life, production labor, and vocational labor. These diverse education forms should be integrated into students' daily lives and studies, gradually altering their ways of thinking, collaboration, and communication. Currently, the forms of labor education in universities primarily include part-time work, library management, internships, practical training, social practice, community service, and community labor. Universities should also consider expanding the cultivation of students' vocational and professional skills. The diversification of labor education forms should be centered around practical teaching in professional courses. Emerging technologies such as big data should be used to create a labor education cloud platform for knowledge training related to labor theory and skills. Additionally, intelligent classrooms that combine theory and practice should be established for training in university students' professional operational skills. Initiatives such as creating simulated entrepreneurial incubators and establishing a mentorship system with enterprises should be undertaken to ensure that labor education forms are more technologically advanced and relevant to the times^[3].

6. Conclusion

In the new era, the labor education in colleges and universities is a fundamental, long-term, and complex grand system project that requires the coordinated cooperation of the entire society. Considering the current implementation of labor education in universities and colleges, grasping the demands of labor education for college students, and exploring a new path for nurturing them in this new era is not only crucial but also urgent. Universities and colleges must shoulder the heavy responsibility of this era. With the goal of cultivating students' moral character and promoting their comprehensive qualities and practical abilities, they should focus on addressing the weaknesses in labor education. Through top-level design and gradual exploration, universities should establish labor education courses that align with the comprehensive labor competence of college students in this new era. They should also organize on-campus practical activities, create off-campus labor training bases, and encourage various parties to actively participate. These diverse forms and approaches to labor education will enable college students in the new era to deeply understand the profound truth that "labor is the most honorable, the most noble, the greatest, and the most beautiful," thereby cultivating their core labor competencies of cherishing labor, loving labor, and respecting labor. At the same time, it is essential to actively advocate for the construction of a new system for the education of college students in the new era, which is led by the government, centered around universities and colleges, involves extensive participation from society, receives active support from families, and allows for the independent development of students.

References

- [1] Liu Xiangbing, Li Ke, Peng Weifeng. (2018) *Profoundly Understanding the Significant Significance and Practical Relevance of Strengthening Labor Education in the New Era*. *China Higher Education*, 21, 4-6.
- [2] ZHANG Xin. (2020) *Dilemma Alleviation: An Analysis of the Path of College Students' Labor Education in the New Era*. *Journal of Hubei University of Economics (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, 12, 111-114.
- [3] LIN Kesong, XIONG Qing. (2020) *Toward cross-border integration: The value, understanding and practice of labor education curriculum construction in the new era*. *Journal of Education Science of Hunan Normal University*, 2, 75.