

Research on Optimization Strategies for the Practical Teaching of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Colleges and Universities Based on the Two-Factor Theory of Motivation

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Abstract

According to Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation-hygiene, regarding the practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities, students exhibit low satisfaction with the hygiene factors, such as the quality of teaching staff and practical teaching materials. Moreover, their satisfaction levels are also lacking in terms of motivational factors, including the challenge level of projects, the accuracy of assessments, and the sense of accomplishment in presenting their achievements. This research gives quantitative analysis with questionnaires, which demonstrates the necessity of the establishment of a diverse team for practical teaching in ideological and political theory courses, harnessing next-generation information technologies like 5G to establish a shared database for teaching materials. With the goal of nurturing students, a precise assessment framework can be constructed to accurately gauge the outcomes of practical teaching, thereby enhancing both motivation and hygiene factors and, consequently, elevating university students' sense of achievement.

Keywords

Smart Teaching System, Practice Teaching, Learning Engagement

1. Research Background

The ideological and political theory courses offered in colleges and universities play a pivotal role in fulfilling the mission of fostering students' moral character and civic virtue (Xi, 2020). The quality of these courses is directly linked to addressing fundamental questions, "What kind of individuals are colleges and

universities shaping? How are they cultivating these individuals? And, for whom are they nurturing these individuals?” (Xi, 2020). Practical education within these courses serves as an effective complement to classroom-based theoretical education. It plays a vital role in promoting students’ understanding of ideological and political theory and their ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations (Liu & Huang, 2022). During a symposium for teachers of ideological and political theory courses in schools, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that education should realize the unity of theory and practice, train students with scientific theories, make good use of practical teaching to combine the small classroom of Civics and the big classroom of the society, and guide students to have high aspirations and be strivers (Xi, 2019). In recent years, the practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities has achieved significant milestones. However, there is still room for innovation and improvement in this area.

In the wake of advancements in new technologies and the effects of globalization, the landscape of colleges and universities, both internally and externally, has undergone significant transformations. Simultaneously, the cognitive patterns of university students have been on an upward trajectory, presenting a heightened set of expectations for the practical teaching approach in ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities. Investing in improving the quality and level of college and university civics courses can directly enhance college students’ sense of fulfillment in civics and political theory courses (Chen, 2017). This represents a crucial direction for innovating the practical teaching models in ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities. The foregoing sense of fulfillment of the Civic and Political Theory Course for college students refers to whether college students can get actual gains in the process of learning and thus produce positive feelings, experiences and evaluations (Hu et al., 2022). The key to innovating the practical teaching methods in these courses lies in satisfying students’ subjective preferences, igniting their intrinsic motivation, and providing positive guidance. Therefore, assessing the satisfaction of university students with their participation in the practical teaching in ideological and political theory courses becomes a critical focal point for reform in this area.

In this research, an empirical survey is employed to gather information about the incentives offered to students in practical teaching activities of ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities. By analyzing the specific incentives provided and the feedback received from students, this research aims to provide substantial support for the optimization of reforms in practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities.

2. Theoretical Basis

This research is grounded in Herzberg’s two-factor theory of motivation (Herzberg, 2009), which was proposed by American psychologist and behavioral

scientist Frederick Herzberg in 1959 (Robbins, 2006). It is considered a classic theory in organizational behavior that explores the motivation behind work. Through his empirical research, Herzberg discovered that human needs can be categorized into motivational and health care needs that are independent of each other, and the satisfaction-dissatisfaction continuum actually encompasses a dual continuum, which indicates the opposite of “Satisfaction” is “No Satisfaction” and the opposite of “Dissatisfaction” is “No Dissatisfaction”. No Satisfaction and No Dissatisfaction represents a “zero state” (Dai, 2011). Increasing satisfaction does not necessarily reduce dissatisfaction, and reducing dissatisfaction does not automatically lead to satisfaction (Wang et al., 2018). If the motivational needs are satisfied, people will be able to produce a sense of satisfaction as a result; if the health care needs are satisfied, it can only reduce or eliminate people’s dissatisfaction, therefore, the common motivational factors in the workplace can be categorized into these two categories that have different effects and different functions (Wang et al., 2018). This finding led to Herzberg developing the two-factor theory of motivation-hygiene.

According to the two-factor theory of motivation, there are two categories of factors that influence human behavior: hygiene factors and motivators. Hygiene factors primarily encompass the external environment and supportive conditions outside of work. Herzberg believed that these factors are fundamental to human behavior and can play a preventive role by reducing or eliminating individual dissatisfaction and preventing individual losses due to dissatisfaction, but they do not truly motivate people. He also believed the absence of these factors would result in dissatisfaction. On the other hand, motivators stem from the work itself, such as the challenging nature of the tasks, sense of accomplishment, and perceived importance. Herzberg argued that only when the needs related to motivators are fulfilled can individuals be motivated (Zhang & Chen, 2021).

Motivation-health care two-factor theory shows that motivational factors and safeguard factors are independent of each other and cannot be replaced by each other, and the important role of safeguard factors is to reduce or eliminate people’s dissatisfaction, so that motivational factors can effectively mobilize people’s enthusiasm. The ideological and political theory courses practice teaching in colleges and universities is oriented to all students, the external environment and conditions provided are convergent, and the content of practice and its evaluation of the content and accompanying teaching are different, so we can grasp the distribution of college students’ satisfaction with each component of practice teaching in order to effectively improve the quality of the practice teaching of ideological and political theory courses.

At the same time, Herzberg also pointed out that the difference between incentives and safeguards is in the form rather than in the content, and that any content may have health care or incentive due to its equal enjoyment or fair disposal. Based on the dual-factor theory of incentive-health care, the strategy to improve the practical teaching of Civic and Political Theory Classes in colleges

and universities comes from the analysis of the distribution structure of college students' satisfaction with practical teaching.

3. Research Process and Survey Analysis

Regarding the practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities, there are three distinct types of practices when considering the spatial dimension: in-class practice, extracurricular practice, and virtual practice. In-class practice occurs within the confines of the theoretical classroom setting. It involves delving deep into case studies through methods such as classical work reading, group discussions, and case presentations. Extracurricular practice takes place beyond the theoretical classroom, encompassing practical activities conducted in settings such as campuses, communities, and businesses. Virtual practice is a relatively recent development in practical teaching, emerging with the advancement of information technology. It involves teachers utilizing next-generation technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) to engage students in practical teaching through historical reenactments, role-playing, and other immersive experiences. These three categories of practical teaching in ideological and political theory courses differ significantly in terms of content and format. Comparing the satisfaction levels of students with each category of practical teaching can lead to a comprehensive understanding of how effective each practice type is in motivating and guiding students.

Based on the process of practical activities, each category of practical teaching consists of four stages: determining the practice project, acquiring project-related information, managing the practice process, and evaluating the practice outcomes. In this research, Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation is applied to identify the hygiene factors and motivators associated with each stage of practical teaching within three categories of practice. Based on this, a standardized questionnaire consisting of 52 core questions is designed, which uses a five-level scale. The questionnaire showcases an internal consistency with a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.83 and content validity of 0.88. The purpose of this research is to investigate the specific circumstances of how university students engage in practical activities within different practical teaching models of ideological and political theory courses. During the research, university students' satisfaction with practical teaching models are collected and analyzed, with focus on hygiene factors such as the practice environment conditions, as well as motivators such as the challenge and achievement associated with the practice content. Additionally, an assessment is conducted on the impact of hygiene factors and motivators on university students, based which targeted recommendations for practical teaching reforms are proposed.

To ensure the universality, representativeness, and depth of the research findings, this research employs a combined approach of questionnaire surveys and individual case interviews (Patton, 2015). Undergraduate students in their first and second years from full-time programs at universities in the Yangtze River

Delta region are selected as the research subjects. Questionnaires are distributed using random sampling methods, and individual case subjects are chosen based on the results of descriptive statistics.

This survey targeted full-time undergraduate students at universities in the Yangtze River Delta region and employed a simple random sampling method. A total of 1272 questionnaires were distributed, with 1127 returned and 1052 of them considered valid, representing an effective response rate of 93%. Among the respondents, 845 were male, accounting for 80.3% of the total, while 247 were female, constituting 19.7% of the total. In terms of academic disciplines, there were 794 students from engineering disciplines, 137 from natural sciences, and 121 from humanities and social sciences. Regarding their household registration, the majority of respondents came from rural areas, being 58.6%, while those with urban household registration accounted for 41.4%. Based on the distribution of survey data and the purpose of this research, the researchers selected 24 individuals from the survey respondents for individual case interviews.

3.1. University Students Exhibit a Relatively High Overall Satisfaction with the Three Different Types of Practical Teaching Models

The descriptive statistics of the questionnaire survey indicate a high overall satisfaction of university students regarding the practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses. Specifically, the percentages of students who were very satisfied or relatively satisfied with the three types of practical teaching are as follows: in-class practice 78%, extracurricular practice 87%, and virtual practice 83%. Conversely, the percentages of students who were very dissatisfied or relatively dissatisfied are as follows: in-class practice 11%, extracurricular practice 9%, and virtual practice 13%.

The students perceived that practical teaching offered a significantly improved experiential and participatory dimension compared to theoretical instruction in ideological and political theory courses. “During our visits to various venues, I encountered numerous vivid and real-life examples. It helped me grasp the scientific and revolutionary aspects of the Marxist and the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics taught by the teacher in class. I find them easier to comprehend than abstract theories” (said Z, a pseudonym, the same below). “I had a VR experience of the Red Army climbing snow-capped mountains and crossing grasslands. It was really challenging, and it made me realize the greatness of our martyrs” (said L). “In our classroom, we recreated history through role-playing. It was my first time entering the inner world of historical figures, and it left a profound impact on me” (said G).

3.2. The Faculty for Practical Teaching of Ideological and Political Theory Courses Is Insufficient and Lacks a Balanced Structure

As indicated in **Table 1**, over half of the students showed satisfaction with the teaching staff and their guidance provided in the three types of practical teaching

Table 1. Practice process management—faculty strength and guidance effectiveness.

	Very Satisfied	Relatively Satisfied	Not Clear	Relatively Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In-class practice	21%	38%	25%	9%	7%
Extracurricular practice	20%	27%	30%	18%	5%
Virtual practice	24%	35%	29%	8%	4%

in ideological and political theory courses. However, the overall satisfaction level was low in terms of the extracurricular practice. This could be attributed to the following fact. Extracurricular practical activities offer more freedom in terms of time and encompass a wider range of forms, including in-depth activities like research and exploration, in addition to visits and inspections. The flexible practice schedule places higher demands on the interaction and communication between teachers and students, while the diverse and multifaceted nature of these practical activities lead students to expect more comprehensive guidance from their teachers. When teachers fail to meet their students' expectations in terms of frequency, closeness, and instructional competence, the inspirational and motivational impact of practical activities on students may significantly diminish.

“Practice simply involves going out, broadening your horizons. It’s not all that different from just looking around on your own” (said B). “I want to learn more about the history of tech companies, but the course teacher couldn’t provide additional information, and I have to look it up myself” (said F).

3.3. There Is a Lack of Appeal and Specificity in Practical Teaching Content Design

Statistical data in **Table 2** reveals that extracurricular practice held the highest appeal to students, followed by virtual practice, while in-class practice was the least engaging.

Students commonly expressed that the in-class practice of ideological and political theory courses often took the form of group discussions, classical work reading, and watching audio and video materials. “These forms are used in other classes as well, and there’s nothing particularly distinctive about them,” and “Even though the teacher claims it is a practice class, it feels like we’re just doing activities in class without the theoretical aspect. We don’t feel a sense of practicality or depth in these activities. We students merely participate symbolically” (said W). This type of practical teaching tends to cultivate students’ critical thinking abilities. However, it is limited by time and space, which can affect the depth and experiential aspect of the content, leading to a lack of sense of fulfillment for the students. Virtual practice, often conducted using VR and other new technologies, tends to stimulate high enthusiasm among students. However, it also suffers from issues such as limited content, repetition, and low coverage. “The virtual practice using VR is very interesting, and everyone wants to participate, but there’s just too little content. I’ve encountered situations where different

Table 2. Practice projects—content appeal.

	Very Satisfied	Relatively Satisfied	Not Clear	Relatively Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In-class practice	11%	23%	24%	26%	16%
Extracurricular practice	16%	32%	20%	20%	12%
Virtual practice	15%	30%	23%	18%	14%

teachers for different courses used the same virtual practice content, and it felt awkward” (said B). The extracurricular practice activities offer a more diverse range of forms, providing students with fresher and more engaging practical materials, thus gaining the highest level of recognition. However, higher-grade students expressed lower satisfaction levels compared to lower-grade students. “In our freshman year, we visited science and technology museums and red education bases. In our sophomore year, we went to the same places, and there wasn’t a noticeable difference. It felt like a bit of a waste of time” (said C). “We hope to develop some real skills during practical activities, but most of the time, we’re just walking around and looking at things, and it doesn’t seem very practical” (said C).

3.4. There Is a Gap between the Challenge Level of Practical Teaching Tasks in Ideological and Political Theory Courses and the Students’ Abilities

While over 60% of students believed that the practical teaching tasks in ideological and political theory courses aligned well with their abilities (as shown in **Table 3**), approximately 30% of students felt that the challenge level of these tasks did not match their capabilities. When tasks are significantly more challenging than what the students can handle, they may be deterred by a fear of difficulty and choose to forgo in-depth exploration. “I’m an engineering student, and reading classic Marxist theory is already very challenging for me. Applying Marxist theory to explain social issues is even harder, so I end up just writing a survey report,” said a student. Conversely, when tasks are less challenging than students’ abilities, they may resort to perfunctory efforts. “Several courses assigned tasks related to introducing our hometown’s red culture, and you can easily find information on Baidu with a simple search. There’s a lot available online.” In both cases, these tasks may fail to effectively stimulate students’ intrinsic motivation.

3.5. There Is Need for Increased Diversity, Topicality, and Richness of the Practical Teaching Materials of Ideological and Political Theory Courses

The resources for practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities come from a wide range of sources and forms, and rich practical teaching materials are the prerequisite and foundation for improving

Table 3. Practice projects—challenge level of tasks and ability adaptability.

	The challenge level of the task is very suitable for my ability	The challenge level of the task is relatively suitable for my ability	Not clear	The challenge level of the task is relatively unsuitable for my ability	The challenge level of the task is very unsuitable for my ability
In-class practice	28%	36%	10%	19%	7%
Extracurricular practice	25%	33%	9%	22%	11%
Virtual practice	24%	38%	17%	11%	10%

the quality of the courses (Che, 2022). The accuracy, topicality, and richness of these practical teaching materials directly impact students' interest in learning and determine the sustainability, engagement, and creativity of their learning experiences. Based on the survey results, students showed insufficient satisfaction with the practical teaching materials used in ideological and political theory courses (as shown in Table 4), with approximately 50% of the students expressing satisfaction while over 30% expressing dissatisfaction. According to the students, “the materials are too outdated, and case studies of economic development are even still about Taobao. I find it hard to be interested” (said G). “Some teachers simply give us the materials and expect us to learn on our own, but I can't see how these materials relate to the content covered in class” (said F). “Teachers don't communicate. Some materials are used in multiple courses, and I don't see anything new” (said D).

3.6. The Limited Variety in Displaying Practice Outcomes and the Traditional Assessment Methods Fail to Reflect the Characteristics of Practical Teaching

In accordance with the *Basic Requirements for Ideological and Political Theory Teaching in Colleges and Universities in the New Era* issued by The Ministry of Education

(http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201804/t20180426_334273.html), it is stipulated that “multiple methods should be adopted to comprehensively assess students' understanding and practical application of the content learned. Emphasis should be placed on examining students' ability to use the Marxist standpoint, viewpoints, and methods to analyze and solve problems, striving to comprehensively and objectively reflect students' Marxist theoretical literacy and ethical qualities.” Therefore, the assessment methods for practical teaching of ideological and political theory should be diverse and targeted, where educational objectives should be incorporated. The mode of assessment should be based on a closed-book unified examination, with emphasis on process assessment and the introduction and increase of open-ended and personalized assessment methods. In practice, however, there is still room for improvement in both the practice achievement presentation and the assessment methods (Table 5).

Table 4. Practical project materials—accuracy, topicality, and richness of materials (from the perspective of combining theory with practice).

	Very Satisfied	Relatively Satisfied	Not Clear	Relatively Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
In-class practice	22%	35%	12%	19%	12%
Extracurricular practice	18%	29%	19%	22%	12%
Virtual practice	19%	31%	17%	23%	10%

Table 5. Practice achievements and assessment methods—diverse presentation of achievements and flexible evaluation methods.

	Very Approved	Relatively Approved	Not Clear	Relatively Disapproved	Very Disapproved
In-class practice	32%	30%	13%	15%	10%
Extracurricular practice	30%	33%	18%	12%	8%
Virtual practice	29%	31%	17%	13%	10%

Students held that despite the incorporation of practical teaching in ideological and political theory courses, the assessment methods predominantly relied on traditional forms such as reports and essays. These methods did not focus on the students' attitudes and engagement in the practice process; neither did they take into account individualized growth assessments based on students' circumstances. Consequently, there was a limited distinction between practical teaching and theoretical coursework. "Practical and theoretical learning are quite similar; all you need to do is submit a report, and students with strong writing skills excel" (said G). "Each student's experiences and feelings are different, and their starting points vary. However, teachers use only a single standard for grading, so it's more worthwhile to spend time studying knowledge rather than investing in practical experiences" (said W).

Regarding the practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities, as demonstrated by the survey, students exhibit higher levels of satisfaction with the hardware aspects of the hygiene factors in the four stages: determining practice projects, obtaining information about practice projects, managing the practice process, and evaluating practice results. However, their satisfaction with the software aspects is lacking. On the other hand, students express a lower overall satisfaction with the motivators involved in these four stages. Specifically, students are relatively satisfied with the practice types, the basic hardware conditions provided, and the temporal and spatial environment within the hygiene factors. In contrast, they are less satisfied with aspects like the ratio and structure of teaching staff, as well as the basic materials provided by the projects. With regard to the motivators, students are less satisfied with the content of the practice projects, the level of challenge they pose, and the assessment methods employed for practice activities. This results in a weaker

sense of achievement for university students in practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses and leads to less-than-ideal teaching outcomes.

4. Countermeasures and Research Conclusion

Motivation is the stimulation and encouragement of human behavior, which promotes and facilitates the achievement of set goals through behavioral efforts (Zhang, 2003). According to Herzberg, changes to the hygiene factors, namely the work environment and supportive conditions, does not effectively motivate individuals. However, the absence of these factors can lead to dissatisfaction. On the other hand, the motivators, such as the level of challenge, sense of accomplishment, and perceived importance of the work being undertaken, can effectively activate people's motivation.

To address the aforementioned issues, this research asserts the need for optimization and adjustment in three key aspects: teachers, resources, and methods.

4.1. Optimizing the Structure of Faculty for Practical Teaching of Ideological and Political Theory Courses

Given the current rapid development phase in China, characterized by constant emergence of new technologies and achievements, it is essential to diversify the faculty involved in practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses. In addition to intensifying efforts to train full-time ideological and political theory teachers within colleges and universities, there should be an open invitation to social elites from all walks of life, including inspirational red speakers, contemporary role models, technological pacesetters, and domain experts. The aim is to build a versatile team of practical mentors, thereby catering to the diverse needs of students with varying professional backgrounds and cognitive levels. In this way, we can effectively stimulate students' curiosity, satisfy their thirst for knowledge, and guide their personal growth and development.

4.2. Establishing a Shared Database for Practical Teaching Materials of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Colleges and Universities

During the Two Sessions, i.e., the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), in 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping paid a visit to the medical and health sector as well as the education sector attending the CPPCC, where Xi emphasized that "we must make good use of the 'great ideological and political education' and ensure their relevance to reality. When teaching ideological and political theory, we must not simply read from documents mechanically, making it lifeless and dull." The rich and varied content of socialist modernization in China provides the most vibrant material for practical teaching in ideological and political theory courses. The material for practical teaching cannot be used directly, and teachers should reprocess the material for practical teaching according to the teaching objectives and theoretical teaching content, including screening, combination, transforma-

tion and replacement (Che, 2022). The capabilities of individual teachers or universities are limited, and current colleges and universities suffer from common issues in practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses, such as insufficient richness of teaching materials, underexplored educational factors, and a lack of systematic resources. In this regard, the advancements in VR, big data, artificial intelligence, 5G and other information technologies offer opportunities to tackle these challenges. Colleges and universities can establish a shared database for practical teaching materials of ideological and political theory courses, leveraging blockchain technology to collaborate on the research and development of high-quality teaching resources. This collaborative effort will foster a sustainable supply of practical teaching materials that are co-created, shared, and of co-optimized.

4.3. Developing an Assessment Indicator System for Practical Teaching Aligned with the Educational Goals of the New Era

According to the *Opinions on Further Strengthening the Construction of Faculty for of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Colleges and Universities*, it is stipulated that practical teaching of ideological and political theory courses constitutes a compulsory credit. Practical teaching of these courses involves a significant workload and broad coverage, while featuring diversity, flexibility, and the involvement of various personnel. As a result, there is currently no unified standard within academia for evaluating the effectiveness of practical teaching. From the findings of this research, it is evident that the construction of an assessment framework should place a strong emphasis on developmental indicators, such as the improvement and development of students' personalities, the formation and stability of their values, and personalized guidance. It should also strike a balance between the uniqueness of practice projects and the uniformity of educational objectives. Meanwhile, the assessment criteria for practical teaching should focus on the design of motivators to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation and enhance their senses of fulfillment, achievement and value. This entails creating a unified system of outcome-based and process-based indicators, integrating internal and external assessments, harmonizing qualitative and quantitative assessments, and aligning individual and team assessments. This will enable a comprehensive assessment of students while facilitating precise motivation strategies, ultimately enhancing university students' sense of accomplishment in higher education.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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