

Original Paper

Exploring the Pathways for Cultivating Social Responsibility among Contemporary College Students

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Abstract

College students are a valuable asset to society. Enhancing their sense of social responsibility plays a crucial role in improving the effectiveness of ideological and political education in higher education institutions, fostering the personal growth and success of students, and advancing social development. By strengthening the “quadrilateral interaction” among students, families, universities, and society, and by establishing an “Internet + Social Responsibility of College Students” cultivation model, this study explores new pathways for enhancing the social responsibility of contemporary college students.

Keywords

College students, Social responsibility, Cultivation pathways

1. Introduction

“Social responsibility” refers to the duties and obligations an individual should fulfill to contribute to societal development. It encompasses the autonomous actions one takes to promote the growth and progress of oneself, one's family, society, and the broader human community, as well as to enhance the surrounding living environment (UNESCO, International Commission on the Development of Education, 1996). Social responsibility is a key criterion for assessing the professional qualities of university students in a nation. Only those with a strong sense of social responsibility can be regarded as qualified talents. The “Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Accelerating the Construction of High-Quality Undergraduate Education to Enhance Talent Cultivation Capabilities” emphasizes the enhancement of students' social responsibility, innovative spirit, and practical abilities, and integrates these aspects into the core themes of educational strategy. It further illustrates the significant value and role of cultivating social responsibility among university students.

2. The Current State of Social Responsibility among Contemporary University Students

Marxism asserts that as a defined and real individual, you have certain determinations, a mission, and tasks to fulfill (Yang, 2014). The prevailing sense of social responsibility among current university students is generally positive and aligns with the standards required for societal development. However, there are also some issues that cannot be overlooked, such as students' confusion and lack of accurate understanding regarding social responsibility. These issues require significant attention and urgent resolution.

2.1 Low Awareness of Social Responsibility among Some University Students

In the cultivation of social responsibility among university students, self-awareness, self-discipline, and self-improvement are key. However, with the ongoing social transformation and economic transition, the rapid spread of Western ideologies through the Internet has introduced a more diverse and complex social environment in China. The prevalence of materialism and hedonism, in particular, has hindered the establishment of correct values among university students, affecting their decision-making and value judgments and leading to conflicts of responsibility. Many students' understanding of society is often self-centered and driven by emotional impulses, resulting in a more egocentric perspective that prioritizes personal interests over collective interests. Their ability to assume social responsibility is limited, and their social ideals are often vague. They fail to recognize the interdependence between themselves, others, and society, and are unaware of the responsibilities and obligations they should shoulder for societal development. This leads to a general indifference toward social responsibility. Moreover, in the digital age, university students are more susceptible to the influence of individualism, which, coupled with the virtual nature of the online environment, can distort their perceptions and diminish their sense of social responsibility.

2.2 Limited Approaches and Methods for Cultivating Social Responsibility among Contemporary University Students

The approaches and methods used to cultivate social responsibility among university students serve as the vehicles and conduits for transmitting and instilling the content of social responsibility. These methods can be employed by educators, allowing for interaction and mutual influence between the educator and the student. However, the current methods and pathways available are often limited and lack diversity (Chen & Zhang, 2009). Contemporary university students are characterized by active thinking and a strong enthusiasm for creativity. Therefore, the methods and approaches used to cultivate and enhance their social responsibility should be diverse. Only by adopting varied cultivation pathways and methods that align with the characteristics of the younger generation can we effectively enhance students' sense of social responsibility. However, influenced by Western liberalism, universities have increasingly emphasized the values of freedom and democracy, while the focus on responsibilities and obligations has diminished. The current approach to cultivating social responsibility among students overly relies on the teaching of ideological and political theory courses, with fewer practical activities, student organizations, and volunteer services that could quickly boost

students' proactive awareness of social responsibility. This over-reliance on didactic education and the lack of diversified cultivation methods make it challenging to achieve substantial results in fostering social responsibility among university students.

2.3 Lack of Involvement from Family, Universities, and Society in Cultivating Responsibility

The family is the first classroom for cultivating social responsibility in university students, and its influence on their growth and development is ever-present, particularly in the formation of social responsibility. Families play an irreplaceable role in this process. However, in reality, some families and parents tend to overly indulge their children and fail to prioritize the cultivation of social responsibility. Additionally, some parents do not set a good example for their children in their behavior and attitudes, instead shifting the responsibility of cultivating social responsibility onto universities and society. Universities, as organized and purposeful institutions responsible for education, bear an undeniable responsibility for cultivating social responsibility among students. Enhancing students' awareness and ability to take on social responsibility is a central goal in the ongoing reform and development of higher education. However, many universities are currently too focused on academic performance and lack sufficient emphasis on the cultivation of social responsibility. They have not fully utilized their resources to educate students in this area, and communication between universities, students, and parents is increasingly lacking. The university campus, while a microcosm of society, still differs significantly from the broader society. The current social environment is increasingly complex, presenting numerous temptations and challenges to relatively naïve students, who are easily influenced by corrupt ideologies and led astray. Moreover, some illegal social organizations deliberately lure students into criminal activities, which poses significant challenges to the cultivation of social responsibility.

2.4 The Disconnect between Theory and Practice among Contemporary University Students

The cultivation of social responsibility follows its own inherent laws and is a direct reflection of one's knowledge and cultivation in practice. Social practice has become one of the most important means of education for today's youth, playing a crucial role in the development of social responsibility among university students. The qualities of independent decision-making, self-management, a well-rounded personality, strong character, and a positive personal image are concentrated expressions of the high quality of contemporary university students. At the same time, the cultivation of good personal qualities and the continuous improvement of the ability to adapt to society are inseparable from the combined education of theoretical knowledge and social practice. The essence of social responsibility is contribution, and it is only in the process of social practice that university students can truly exercise their sense of social responsibility. While students' ability to grasp textbook knowledge is constantly improving through specialized study, the low level of social practice leads to a situation where the knowledge and skills they acquire are not effectively applied in serving the community. Independent decision-making and self-management are manifestations of responsibility. Only when responsibility is emphasized in both the environment and education, with a focus on the effectiveness of practice-based education, can we hope to shape qualified university students.

3. Pathways for Cultivating Social Responsibility among Contemporary University Students

The importance of cultivating social responsibility among contemporary university students is widely recognized by society today. Fostering a sense of social responsibility in students is not just a matter of personal development but is also closely related to the progress of the nation and society. It is essential to regulate students' behavior according to the demands and characteristics of the new era, address the lack of social responsibility among young university students, and continuously improve the capacity for cultivating social responsibility.

3.1 Guiding the Cultivation of Social Responsibility with Innovative Theories

Genuine social responsibility is derived from theoretical knowledge, as it is the refinement and synthesis of such knowledge that leads to a conscious sense of responsibility, rather than one based on instinct. In today's complex social environment, only through the elevation of knowledge can one develop systematic, farsighted, and well-planned actions reflecting social responsibility. For contemporary university students, using innovative theories as a guide and strengthening the study of cultural and scientific knowledge are vivid manifestations of cultivating social responsibility. The integration of Marxism with the education of contemporary university students has already yielded preliminary results, particularly in the areas of ideological and political education, student growth environments, and models for cultivating social responsibility. By adhering to the combination of innovative theories with social development interests, we can establish an effective mechanism for cultivating social responsibility among university students.

3.2 Expanding the Channels for Cultivating Social Responsibility through the Internet

To effectively cultivate and educate contemporary university students on social responsibility, it is necessary to align with the characteristics of the new media era and explore new pathways for “Internet + social responsibility”. This involves adhering to the fundamental principles of online education for cultivating social responsibility in the digital age and developing a three-dimensional educational model that integrates “theoretical learning, practical training, and online education”. Firstly, strengthening campus network infrastructure can enhance the initiative in cultivating social responsibility among students. Utilizing online platforms to comprehensively cover students' academic, work, and life activities can provide strong support for their actions and awareness in fulfilling social responsibilities, thereby creating more opportunities for cultivating and enhancing social responsibility. By offering services such as academic tutoring, psychological counseling, and competition exchanges through campus network platforms, universities can continuously optimize students' sense of social responsibility and transform online interfaces into diverse communication platforms that present social responsibility education in ways that are engaging and accessible to students. Secondly, innovating the application of mobile technology can increase the appeal of social responsibility education. Ideological and political educators in universities should seize the opportunity to integrate social responsibility education into various aspects of students' lives, such as study, work, and entertainment, through mobile apps. This enables students to receive social responsibility education anytime and anywhere via

mobile applications, thereby effectively enhancing the practical impact of such education.

3.3 Establishing a Triadic Mechanism Involving Family, Universities, and Society

The cultivation of social responsibility among university students requires the unified efforts of students themselves, their families, universities, and society. Neglecting or overemphasizing any one aspect will not achieve the desired outcome. In the process of cultivating social responsibility, students, families, universities, and society form a gradually expanding community. Within this community, the family is the most crucial environment for instilling mainstream moral values, offering a strong incentive effect. Therefore, it is important to leverage the influence of the family and use parental role modeling to initiate the first steps in social responsibility education. In universities, the key to cultivating social responsibility lies with the teachers. Teachers act as a bridge in the cultivation process, building on parental guidance and emphasizing moral education as a crucial component of social responsibility education. They must develop a personal charm that resonates with students, fostering a mindset of serving society and continuously internalizing knowledge of social responsibility into thoughts and actions. On the societal level, it is essential to improve the social security system related to responsible behavior. This includes penalizing deviant behaviors that shirk social responsibility and, conversely, protecting and rewarding behaviors that positively contribute to society and set a good example for others. Ultimately, this approach will create a social environment that encourages university students to embrace their responsibilities. Moreover, in the cultivation process, if problems arise, establishing a joint reflection and disciplinary mechanism involving families, universities, and society can harness their respective strengths and achieve a synergistic effect greater than the sum of its parts.

3.4 Encouraging University Students to Actively Engage in Social Practice

The cultivation of social responsibility is inherently an active process; it is only through action that the social value of responsibility can be realized. In practice, individuals are both the creators of value and the bearers of responsibility, which can only be fulfilled through social engagement. To enhance social responsibility, students must be given the opportunity to fully experience the significance of social responsibility through practice, enabling them to recognize its value and genuinely fulfill their obligations. University students should be encouraged to combine classroom knowledge with diverse social practice opportunities. Guided by Xi Jinping's views on youth, students should strive to integrate theoretical cognition with moral practice, ensuring that learning is matched by action. While students work hard to acquire academic knowledge, they should also engage in various forms of social practice, including extracurricular activities, student organizations, "Three Rural Areas" social practice programs, and volunteer service. By stepping out of the classroom and into society, students can gain a more accurate understanding of the world and effectively combine academic knowledge with practical experience. This engagement will allow students to realize their personal value in social practice, thereby enhancing their sense of collective honor and social responsibility.

4. Epilogue

Cultivating social responsibility among university students is an inherent requirement for social development. Social responsibility is one of the ideological expressions directly linked to the economic and political structures of a given society. As the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics advances, the role of university students becomes increasingly important. It is essential to continuously strengthen the cultivation of social responsibility awareness among young students, enhance their social responsibility skills, and promote their all-around development. By doing so, we can ensure a steady supply of talent for the construction of a new era of socialism.

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