

Original Paper

Strategies for Enhancing the Competencies of Economically
Disadvantaged Students in Higher Education Institutions in the
New Era

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the new era, China's higher education has entered a phase of high-quality development, with institutional support policies for student development becoming increasingly refined alongside the optimization of financial aid systems. This paper, grounded in the practical work of university counselors, systematically analyzes the current challenges faced by economically disadvantaged students in areas such as academic motivation, social psychology, integrity cultivation, and gratitude awareness. It elucidates the significance of enhancing the quality and capabilities of such students in the new era for implementing moral education, promoting educational equity, and cultivating new generations for the times. The paper proposes a comprehensive strategy of "strengthening value guidance, focusing on psychological development, Solidifying Professional Foundations, and Cultivating Innovative Practical Abilities." This comprehensive strategy aims to help economically disadvantaged students holistically enhance their comprehensive qualities and achieve high-quality growth and development.

Keywords

New Era, Higher Education Institutions, Economically Disadvantaged Students, Comprehensive Qualities and Abilities, Financial Aid and Student Development, Fostering Moral Integrity and Cultivating Talent

1. Analysis of the Current Situation of Economically Disadvantaged Students

1.1 Reduced Academic Motivation Due to Family Circumstances

Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds commonly face significant financial burdens, with many choosing to work part-time or engage in work-study programs during their free time to cover living expenses. While work-study is commendable, some students, constrained by limited energy and poor time-management skills, tend to prioritize part-time work over academics. First-year students, in particular, are prone to overcommitting to part-time work while navigating diverse campus life and the desire for “financial independence,” often neglecting their academic studies. Students with weaker self-discipline are more susceptible to external distractions, further reducing time allocated to academics. Over time, this leads to diminished motivation and declining grades. When choosing postgraduate paths in their senior year, many students abandon graduate school applications due to urgency to alleviate family burdens and lack of exam preparation funds, opting instead for immediate employment. Parents often hold conservative expectations, prioritizing “a stable job.” Such academic choices constrained by family finances diverge from the new era's demand for highly skilled, educated talent, limiting students' long-term development.

1.2 Social Challenges Arising from Low Self-Confidence

Though contemporary college students grow up in an internet-driven era with diverse social settings, economically disadvantaged students still face significant integration difficulties. They commonly exhibit low self-confidence, appearing reserved and passive in public settings, hesitant to actively express themselves, and thus occupying a disadvantaged position in interpersonal interactions. Some students experience psychological disparities due to economic differences, becoming overly sensitive and suspicious, excessively concerned with others' opinions, and even deliberately avoiding social activities, making it difficult for them to integrate into groups. In course components such as group learning and teamwork, feelings of inferiority make them reluctant to speak up or attempt new challenges, causing them to miss opportunities to develop their abilities. Simultaneously, modern social interactions demand higher communication skills and digital collaboration abilities. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, lacking relevant developmental environments, often possess insufficient social experience and skills. This further exacerbates interpersonal barriers, hindering improvements in teamwork capabilities and social adaptability.

1.3 Weak Integrity Awareness among Individual Students

The refinement of university financial aid policies and increased support in the new era have provided robust safeguards for economically disadvantaged students. However, this has also fostered integrity issues among a minority of students. During eligibility verification for economically disadvantaged students, instances include falsifying supporting documents, obtaining fraudulent certificates through connections, and deliberately concealing family income. In scholarship and grant selection processes, some students form cliques and engage in mutual exclusion, leading to financial aid resources being skewed toward students with “good connections” rather than genuine need. Additionally, incidents of

exam cheating, deliberate default on tuition fees and student loans occur with some frequency. While the state has extended loan repayment periods to safeguard students' right to education, some graduates persistently default without justification, viewing such delays as “trivial.” This violates fundamental principles of integrity in the new era and squanders valuable public resources.

1.4 Widespread Lack of Gratitude

Gratitude is a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation and a core competency expected of contemporary college students. However, some financially disadvantaged students exhibit a notable lack of gratitude. Certain students view state and institutional aid as “a given,” believing that “poverty is caused by society, so assistance is deserved,” overlooking the social care and resource investment behind these policies. Worse still, some spend aid on nonessential consumption like dining, entertainment, or romantic pursuits, undermining the policy's purpose of “supporting the needy and nurturing talent.” Regarding public service, some students refuse volunteer work to earn required hours, even complaining bitterly about reforms to the system, completely disregarding the value of social contribution. This lack of gratitude reflects deficiencies in the cultivation of values among some students, contradicting the spirit of “responsibility, dedication, and gratitude” advocated in the new era.

2. The Crucial Significance of Enhancing the Competencies of Economically Disadvantaged Students in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era

2.1 A Core Measure for Implementing the Educational Philosophy of Cultivating Virtue and Nurturing Talent

Cultivating virtue and nurturing talent is the fundamental mission of higher education in the new era. Enhancing the competencies of economically disadvantaged students represents a concrete practice in realizing this philosophy. As the primary entities for talent development, universities integrate multiple resources—including student affairs offices, youth league committees, counseling centers, academic departments, and counselors—to establish a collaborative education system that unifies value formation, competency development, and knowledge transmission. In financial aid work, this approach transcends the limitations of “purely economic assistance” by shifting toward a comprehensive educational model of “financial support + competency enhancement.” It guides students in establishing correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values, cultivating the spirit of hard work and self-reliance. This ensures the concept of fostering virtue truly transforms into an intrinsic driving force for student growth, aligning with the core requirements of talent cultivation in the new era.

2.2 Demonstrating the Contemporary Value of Fairness in Higher Education

Educational equity stands as the core pursuit of the new era's educational endeavors, with students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds being a key focus group. Enhancing the competencies of these students represents a crucial measure for advancing educational fairness. The state ensures students' right to education through diverse financial aid policies—including scholarships, loans, grants, subsidies, and fee reductions—alongside systems such as the “green channel” for new students and travel and living

expense subsidies for financially struggling freshmen. Building upon this foundation, universities provide equal learning opportunities, development platforms, and capacity-building resources to students in need through precise identification, targeted assistance, and tailored education. This effectively narrows development gaps caused by differences in family background, ensuring every student enjoys equitable and high-quality education in the new era and achieving the educational goal of “leaving no student behind due to poverty.”

2.3 The Practical Need to Cultivate New Talent for the Era

The new era demands higher standards for the comprehensive qualities of talent. As a significant segment of the college student population, the qualities and capabilities of students from economically disadvantaged families directly impact the overall quality of national talent cultivation. Through targeted cultivation measures, universities help these students overcome capability gaps and break through developmental bottlenecks. This not only enables them to realize personal value but also equips society with qualified talents possessing sound moral character, solid professional skills, and strong innovative capabilities. This approach responds to the new era's societal demand for talent while fulfilling universities' responsibility to serve national development and contribute to national rejuvenation. It holds significant importance for advancing social progress and promoting common prosperity.

3. Strategies for Enhancing the Competencies of Economically Disadvantaged Students in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era

3.1 Strengthening Value Guidance to Foster Well-Rounded Personalities

The core of competency enhancement in the new era lies in value cultivation. Universities should leverage platforms such as themed class meetings, ideological and political education courses, and campus cultural activities to reinforce the cultivation of ideals, convictions, and moral integrity among economically disadvantaged students. Counselors may organize events like “Self-Reliance Stars” and “Inspirational Student Role Model Reports” to leverage exemplary role models and foster a campus atmosphere of self-reliance and upward striving. Through gratitude education activities, financial aid policy briefings, and public service sharing sessions, students can be guided to correctly understand the significance of financial support, cultivate awareness of “receiving aid with gratitude and striving for progress with recognition,” and develop a sense of gratitude and social responsibility. Simultaneously, integrate core socialist values into daily education to help students develop sound perspectives on fame and fortune, integrity, and cultivate well-rounded personalities characterized by self-respect, confidence, rationality, composure, and positivity.

3.2 Focus on Psychological Development and Enhance Social Skills

Mental health forms a crucial foundation for the comprehensive development of college students in the new era. Universities should establish a psychological support system involving counselors, psychological centers, student leaders, and families to provide comprehensive psychological assistance to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. First, precisely implement financial aid

policies to alleviate students' economic burdens and eliminate anxiety stemming from financial pressures. Second, conduct targeted mental health lectures, group counseling, and one-on-one psychological consultations to teach emotion regulation, stress management, and confidence-building techniques, helping students develop positive psychological coping mechanisms. Strengthen resilience education to guide students in correctly perceiving their family's economic situation, transforming poverty into a driving force for growth. Simultaneously, diverse social platforms are established through activities like character development programs, interest clubs, and online discussion groups, encouraging proactive communication and engagement. Free training courses in social skills and digital collaboration enhance interpersonal abilities, helping students integrate into campus life and society with a healthy mindset.

3.3 Strengthening Academic Foundations and Enhancing Learning Efficiency

Professional competence is the core capital for students to thrive in society in the new era. Universities should establish comprehensive academic support systems to help economically disadvantaged students solidify their professional foundations. Counselors should lead academic career planning guidance, conducting orientation programs for freshmen to shift students' mindset from "I have to learn" to "I want to learn," fostering self-directed learning awareness and planning skills. Establish "Academic Support Groups" by inviting high-achieving students and faculty to serve as academic mentors. Through peer-to-peer mentoring, these groups provide tutoring in challenging subjects like English and advanced mathematics, sharing study methods and test-taking strategies. Free comprehensive skill-building workshops are offered, covering learning techniques, research methodologies, and digital literacy to address competency gaps. Students also receive complimentary study materials, database access, and exam preparation support to reduce academic costs, thereby enhancing both academic performance and professional competitiveness.

3.4 Strengthening Practical Training to Cultivate Innovation Competencies

Practical innovation capabilities represent the core competitiveness of talent in the new era. Higher education institutions should embrace the principle of "teaching a man to fish rather than giving him a fish," establishing diverse practical innovation platforms for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. On campus, expand work-study positions with priority access for students in need, enabling them to enhance hands-on skills and professional competence through practice. Off campus, collaborate with enterprises, communities, and public welfare organizations to establish practical training bases, offering students opportunities for internships, practical training, volunteer services, and social research to foster deep integration of theory and practice. Students should be encouraged to participate in innovation and entrepreneurship competitions like "Internet Plus" and "Challenge Cup," as well as essay contests, speech competitions, and professional skill contests. Provide participating students with financial support, mentor guidance, and resource connections. Through diverse practical experiences, cultivate students' innovative spirit, practical abilities, and social adaptability, enabling them to accumulate experience, enhance their capabilities, and strengthen their employment competitiveness and development potential.

4. Conclusion

Enhancing the quality and capabilities of economically disadvantaged students in higher education institutions during the new era is a crucial initiative for fulfilling the fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education, promoting educational equity, and cultivating new generations for the times. This endeavor carries significant responsibility and far-reaching implications. As university counselors, we must align with the educational requirements of the new era, adopt a student-centered approach, and implement comprehensive strategies encompassing value guidance, psychological support, academic assistance, and practical empowerment. These efforts should precisely address student needs, helping economically disadvantaged students overcome developmental challenges and comprehensively elevate their overall quality. Moving forward, universities must further refine collaborative education mechanisms, innovate working methods, integrate on- and off-campus resources, and continuously optimize development pathways. This will empower every economically disadvantaged student to strengthen their ideals and strive for self-improvement under the light of the new era, growing into pillars of society with sound character, solid skills, and a sense of responsibility. Ultimately, they will contribute more significantly to the development of the nation and society.

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