

Original Paper

Research on “Pandemic” Education in Higher Education Institutions in Response to Major Public Health Emergencies

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a major public health disaster, causing the loss of loved ones, widespread fear and suffering, and significant economic damage. For higher education, however, the pandemic is both a crisis and an opportunity, as the most profound education often stems from students' lived experiences. Amid this widespread outbreak, adult college students have deeply felt the threat of the virus, experienced the fragility of life, and recognized the vital importance of health. In response to the pandemic, higher education institutions should guide students to actively engage with pandemic-related information, understand the strengths of the centralized leadership of the Communist Party and China's institutional advantages, and appreciate the power of the Chinese Spirit and collective strength.

Keywords

epidemic response, pandemic education, COVID-19

1. Introduction

“Pandemic education” refers to the ideological and political education, as well as humanistic quality education, implemented by higher education institutions for college students in response to major public health emergencies. With nearly 40 million college students in China—a substantial demographic cohort—it constitutes an inherent responsibility of universities to deliver such “pandemic” education during major outbreaks. This obligation arises from both the objective necessity of understanding, preventing, and containing the pandemic, and the subjective demand of students themselves to undergo trials, forge personal growth, and receive pandemic-related education amid the

crisis.

2. The Value Connotation of Pandemic Education in Higher Education Institutions During Epidemic Response

The value connotation of pandemic education in higher education institutions encompasses forging ideological consensus to mobilize students' institutionally appropriate contributions to pandemic containment efforts during major public health emergencies, guiding emotional identification to equip students with critical discernment against negative and disinformation while reinforcing socialist convictions, and cultivating combative spirit to inspire resilient growth through dedicated physical exercise, enhanced fitness, and courageous confrontation with the virus.

2.1 Forging University Students' Ideological Consensus in Pandemic Containment

As pandemic response constitutes a nationwide, comprehensive campaign, students must actively engage in containment efforts, dedicating their youthful vigor to become vital fresh forces in this all-encompassing battle. Thus, higher education institutions must shoulder their anti-pandemic mission by instilling crisis consciousness (“treating pandemics as warfare”) and responsibility awareness (“prioritizing containment over fire prevention”), ensuring students' ideological and behavioral alignment with the overarching containment framework through strict adherence to the unified decisions and deployments of the Party Central Committee and institutional epidemic regulations. This consolidates the consensus for synchronizing academic pursuits with pandemic resistance while fortifying their confidence in confronting and overcoming the crisis. Universities should further mobilize students to spearhead volunteering efforts—participating locally in containment work with rigorous self-protection to bolster community defenses. Under institutional guidance, knowledgeable and dynamic youth emerge as pivotal contributors: humanities students leverage digital prowess to disseminate positive news and energy via new media platforms, while medical students apply technical expertise to exemplify humanistic dedication at community frontlines. These vibrant individual commitments collectively converge into an ocean of youthful strength, constructing a resilient “youth levee” against the pandemic.

2.2 Fostering University Students' Affective Identification with the Party and State

During pandemic containment, higher education institutions must persistently conduct national conditions education and Party history education, empowering young students to dedicate their vigor under the Party and national flags while waging resolute struggles against the virus under the Party's leadership. This enables students to recognize that the leadership superiority of the Communist Party and the institutional advantages of socialism constitute the fundamental guarantee for China's exemplary pandemic control and international acclaim. By dialectically integrating containment efforts with educational imperatives, universities must embed national and Party consciousness into pandemic pedagogy, enhancing its relevance and efficacy. Students should be continually guided to: Comprehend the Party's original aspirations and mission; Discern the extraordinary resolve and formidable

leadership demonstrated by the Party and government throughout the anti-pandemic campaign; Recognize the superiority embodied in Chinese strength, resilience, speed, and governance systems; Thereby strengthening students' ideological and affective identification with the Party, the nation, and socialism. Institutions must leverage their organizational strengths in pandemic education to holistically ensure both containment efficacy and educational continuity, guaranteeing that ideological-political education maintains an unwavering presence—without absence, disarray, or compromise—throughout the pandemic response.

2.3 Inspiring Student Resolve Toward Maturation Through Adversity

Major public health emergencies present both crises and opportunities. Higher education institutions must adeptly transform the “pandemic battlefield” into a “developmental classroom” that catalyzes ideological maturation, leveraging these challenges as catalysts for growth. Throughout the response phase, university counselors, ideological-political educators, and administrators should intensify engagement with students—utilizing virtual platforms to provide academic guidance and life mentorship while fostering rational analysis of social realities. This cultivates expanded perspectives and elevated mindsets, equipping students to dialectically examine adversities through developmental and dynamic logic. Confronting pandemic disasters requires transcending parochial views to address macro-level challenges, directly engaging with epochal difficulties to strengthen personal accountability. As intellectual members of society, students' maturity is measured by their comprehension of contemporary struggles, pandemic literacy, behavioral responses to emergencies, and critical discernment amid disinformation. First, political maturation during pandemic response constitutes the primary indicator of student development. Given the Central Committee and State Council's elevated prioritization of COVID-19—including the General Secretary's direct oversight of containment efforts—universities must proactively elevate students' political consciousness, cultivating a new generation of politically astute youth loyal to the Party and state. Second, mission-driven social responsibility marks the pivotal signifier of maturity. Students' proactive compliance with containment protocols, initiatives in self/communal protection, and exemplary conduct for families, peers, and communities demonstrate their capacity as vanguards shouldering epochal duties.

3. Evidence-Based Formulation of Pandemic Education Content in Higher Education Institutions During Major Public Health Emergencies

The sudden outbreak of major public health emergencies has generated a new pedagogical landscape for pandemic education among university students, simultaneously presenting novel challenges to higher education institutions. Universities should strategically transform the pandemic crisis into an opportunity for advancing ideological-political and humanistic education, achieving seamless integration between scientific epidemic containment and their core educational mission. This necessitates the evidence-based formulation of pandemic education content through strategically identifying pedagogical synergies between public health response and student development.

3.1 Ideal and Belief Education on Love for the Party and the Country

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ideal and belief education on love for the Party and the country has become a core component of higher education institutions' pandemic education, which is entirely justified. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Party has led the entire nation to mobilize all forces to control the epidemic. The Party flag and the national flag have been flying high on the frontlines of the epidemic prevention and control, vividly demonstrating the institutional advantages of our country and expressing the institutional confidence of the Chinese people. This has also provided classic material for the ideal and belief education of college students. With the strong leadership of the Party, the COVID-19 pandemic has been effectively controlled, and the situation has improved.

The combination of epidemic knowledge dissemination and humanistic ideological education is reflected in two aspects:

While popularizing epidemic knowledge among college students, it is important to guide them to recognize the fact that Party members have taken the lead in the fight against the epidemic. This helps them understand the fearless spirit of Party members who sacrifice their own interests for the greater good. The actions of Party members on the frontlines of the epidemic have fully embodied the Party's commitment to serving the public and fulfilling its mission. They have demonstrated the Party's strong leadership and fulfilled the Party's promise and purpose of serving the people.

Higher education institutions should make full use of the "epidemic prevention and control" as a real-life textbook, turning the sudden disaster into a grand classroom for patriotism education. This will help college students recognize the resilience of the Chinese people and the superiority of socialism, and strengthen their ideals and beliefs of loving the Party and the country.

3.2 Responsibility Education: Cultivating Fortitude and Agency

The pandemic necessitates reconceptualizing responsibility education for university students as individuals embedded within familial and societal structures, requiring dual courage for self-accountability and collective stewardship. COVID-19 has witnessed countless heroic narratives of adversity-defying champions who epitomized responsibility through sacrificial service, compelling higher education institutions to strategically orchestrate pedagogy enabling students to internalize the interdependence of assisting others and self-preservation, the ethical imperative of subordinating personal interests to collective well-being, and the non-delegable duty of social responsibility incumbent upon all citizens. The essence of pandemic-era responsibility manifests through volitional compliance with preventive protocols and civilizational praxis—both constituting heightened societal accountability critical to population-level containment efficacy given their determinative role in outbreak control outcomes. This crisis renders the dialectical mutuality between individual and society strikingly visible, demanding universal adherence to social covenants and fulfillment of epidemiological obligations. Medical personnel combatting pathogens on clinical frontlines, security forces fortifying transport arteries as epidemiological bulwarks, and civic actors enabling community defenses collectively exemplify risk-defying societal agency. Implementing such education requires

facilitating critical self-appraisal regarding personal obligation fulfillment while motivating dual engagement in academic rigor and containment praxis through mastery and application of pandemic mitigation competencies—where the integration of knowing and doing constitutes the ultimate manifestation of youthful dynamism in this civilizational challenge.

3.3 Promoting Life Education and Scientific Ethos

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered the essence of traditional family-reunion festivals like the Spring Festival, shifting public discourse from celebratory themes of prosperity and greetings to grim metrics of infections and mortality. As vibrant lives succumb to the virus and festive joy turns somber, university students confront profound existential contemplation—prompting authentic reckoning with health and mortality. Higher education institutions must leverage this pedagogical moment by integrating life and health education into pandemic response frameworks, guiding students toward science-based containment strategies, respect for natural laws, and ecological coexistence. Concretely, universities should utilize the crisis to implement:

- (1) Life Consciousness Education—Illuminating that human existence originates from parental lineage and serves societal purposes, where cherishing life constitutes filial piety and social respect. This inspires academic diligence and capability enhancement to honor both national obligations and familial devotion.
- (2) Health Literacy Cultivation – Fostering physical resilience against pathogens and psychological well-being for enriched living.
- (3) Scientific Ethos Inculcation – Demonstrating how virological combat—from epidemiologists’ vaccine development to frontline triage and public distancing—epitomizes evidence-based rigor. Each measure embodies the scientific ethos that remains humanity’s ultimate weapon against pandemics.

4. Methodological Pathways for Pandemic Education in Higher Education Institutions During Major Public Health Emergencies

Higher education institutions must develop context-specific, temporally adaptive, and opportunity-responsive pedagogical approaches. Guided by the tripartite principle of drawing upon historical precedents, referencing existing frameworks, and pioneering novel approaches, they should construct methodologies characterized by contemporary relevance, alignment with young adults’ developmental characteristics, and operational efficacy in major emergency scenarios.

4.1 Integrating Theory-Practice Nexus with Systemic Methodologies

Seizing the pandemic as a pedagogical moment, higher education institutions must fuse theoretical frameworks with exemplary containment narratives, tailoring content to students’ cognitive realities through case-based integration of theory and praxis. Utilizing virtual platforms like thematic webinars and digital classrooms, ideological-political and quality education courses should elucidate COVID-19’s origins and trajectory, contextualize China’s unique national conditions within global volatility, and interpret traditional ethics alongside existential meaning. Practically, students should be

encouraged to proactively assume social responsibility by participating in community-level containment work with rigorous self-protection. This theory-practice synthesis elevates political consciousness while enhancing pandemic response competencies. Thought constitutes the soul that precedes action; only through scientific systemic thinking can evidence-based pandemic management emerge. University pandemic education must therefore operationalize four consciousness paradigms via corresponding methodologies:

(1) Strategic Thinking → Strategic Consciousness: Anchored in the dual imperatives of cultivating talent for the Party and nurturing excellence for the nation, education sustains its foundational mission through near-term containment victories while advancing long-term developmental goals of forging new-era citizens—all while strategically refining future reforms through critical assessment of operational shortcomings.

(2) Systems Thinking → Holistic Consciousness: Ideological-political and humanistic education must adopt chessboard-like coordination, with institutions, governments, societies, and families assuming differentiated yet synergistic roles to construct an ecological macro-system for pandemic pedagogy.

(3) Precision Thinking → Granular Consciousness: Combining breadth with specificity, education should implement stratified approaches—designing tailored content and modalities for distinct student cohorts (by risk exposure, academic tier, psychosocial profile), providing nuanced psychological guidance akin to gardening: alternating judiciously between broad irrigation for collective needs and targeted drip-feeding for individual growth.

4.2 Concurrent Implementation of Epidemic Containment and Humanistic Care

During major public health emergencies, higher education institutions must center pandemic education around containment imperatives while upholding people-centered principles—establishing real-time epidemic briefing systems to disseminate critical information, national containment policies, and regional measures; addressing student concerns through psychological counseling hotlines that guide emotional self-regulation amidst adversity; and fulfilling academic expectations by sustaining pedagogical continuity via digital platforms under the “suspended classes, ongoing learning” paradigm. Recognizing remote education’s inherent limitations, universities should supplement core instruction with video-based academic support while intensifying thesis supervision and employment assistance for graduating cohorts—developing dedicated job portals, facilitating industry partnerships, and expanding career channels to collectively embody holistic student stewardship throughout the crisis continuum.

4.3 Integrating Pandemic Prevention and Control with Educational Objectives to Optimize Online Pandemic Education Approaches

During major public health emergencies, enhancing the timeliness and effectiveness of pandemic education in higher education institutions fundamentally depends on properly managing the intrinsic relationship between epidemic prevention and educational objectives. It is essential to leverage the advantages of universities in mobilization capacity and organizational systems by conducting student

screening and risk assessment through regional and categorized approaches. This ensures the smooth implementation of both pandemic control measures and educational activities. The goal is to guarantee that “students stop classes but not learning, leave campus but not education,” and that “teachers leave classrooms but not teaching, take holidays but not rest from work.” To innovate the mechanisms of pandemic education, comprehensive coordination, parallel implementation, and deep integration must be achieved. Pandemic prevention and control efforts in universities should incorporate elements of educational guidance, embedding the philosophy and spirit of teaching and moral cultivation into every stage of epidemic management. This will realize the organic integration of pandemic control and educational objectives. During major public health crises, the normal delivery of teaching and ideological-political education in universities is inevitably constrained by physical distancing measures. As a result, online instruction and digital pandemic education have become the primary methodological pathways. Universities should embrace the concept of “smart education” and make full use of information technologies—including big data, television, and other digital platforms—to build a “new media education matrix” that integrates pandemic prevention with educational goals. This matrix should be used to disseminate the central Party leadership’s strategic decisions and policy arrangements regarding pandemic control, promote scientific knowledge about disease prevention, and share inspiring stories and exemplary figures emerging from the fight against the epidemic. In doing so, the cyberspace should be filled with positive energy and strong values.

4.4 A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Pandemic Education in Higher Education Institutions

In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, universities should take the initiative to actively communicate and collaborate with students’ families, urban communities, and rural villages, thereby establishing a three-dimensional collaborative mechanism for pandemic education that integrates families, schools, and society. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: “Communities are the front line of joint prevention and control efforts, as well as the most effective defense line against both imported cases and local transmission. By holding this frontline, we can effectively cut off channels of virus spread.”

As the key link connecting students, families, and universities, communities serve as a bridge for pandemic education between homes and schools. Externally linked to universities and internally connected to students and their families, communities function not only as the frontline for blocking and preventing the spread of the virus, but also as an important platform for delivering pandemic-related knowledge and practical education to college students.

In the current pandemic context, where human resources are often limited, communities require support from university students to join the ranks of pandemic prevention workers. At the same time, students themselves seek opportunities to gain real-world experience. Universities, therefore, need to leverage community resources to implement ideological and political education, quality-oriented education, and labor education locally and in proximity. This synergy among families, communities, and universities creates a united force in pandemic prevention and education.

Universities should actively guide and mobilize young students to use communities as platforms to contribute through their youthful energy and intellectual strengths to the fight against the pandemic. In doing so, students can demonstrate patriotism, exhibit noble moral qualities such as willingness to help others, and showcase a strong sense of responsibility and mission befitting the new era. The family, as the smallest unit of society, plays a guiding and protective role in the growth and development of university students. To maximize the direct influence of families on students, universities should enhance communication with parents during the pandemic, encouraging them to educate and inspire their children through love and care, and to encourage student participation in pandemic-related activities when necessary.

Strengthening pandemic education for university students is not only a strategy but also a duty and task for higher education institutions in responding to major public health emergencies. During this outbreak, contemporary university students and institutions have demonstrated commendable performance in pandemic response and have received social recognition. However, there remain areas for improvement—such as enhancing the proactivity and planning of pandemic education, accelerating the updating and utilization of educational content and materials. In fact, targeted pandemic education holds significant value in preventing and controlling epidemics, mitigating crises, and improving the overall quality of students, while also promoting the maturation and development of university students in the new era.

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